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BARBARA'S HISTORY.

VOL. I.

BARBARA'S HISTORY.

BY

AMELIA B. EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

"MY BROTHER'S WIFE," "HAND AND GLOVE,"
"THE STORY OF CERVANTES,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BARBARA'S HISTORY.

I AM about to tell the story of my life—that is, the story of my childhood and my youth; for the romance of life is mostly lived out before we reach middle age, and beyond that point the tale grows monotonous either in its grief, or its gladness. Mine began and ended when I was young.

When I was young! They are but four words; and yet, at the very commencement of what must prove a labour of many months, they have power to arrest my pen, and blind my eyes with unaccustomed tears. Tears partaking both of joy and sorrow; such tears as those through which we all look back to childhood and its half-forgotten story. Oh, happy time! so islanded in the still waters of memory; so remote, and yet so near; so strange, yet so familiar! Come back once more—come

back, though never so briefly, and light these my pages with the pale sunshine of a faded spring.

I am answered. A pleasant calm steals upon me; and, as one might step aside from the troubled streets, to linger awhile in the quiet sanctuary of a wayside church, so I now turn from the eager present, tread the dim aisles of the past, sigh over the inscriptions graven on one or two dusty tablets, and begin with the recollections of infancy this narrative of my life.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY RECORDS.

" On rajeunit aux souvenirs d'enfance
Comme on renaît au souffle du printemps."

BERANGER.

SOMETIMES, in the suburban districts of London, we chance upon a quaint old house that was, evidently, a country-house some hundred years ago; but which has been overtaken by the town, and stands perplexed amid a neighbourhood of new streets, like a rustic at Charing Cross. There are plenty such. We have seen them in our walks, many a time and oft. They look sad and strange. The shadows gather round them more darkly than on their neighbours. The sunlight seems to pass them by; and we fancy their very walls might speak, and tell us tales. In just such a house, and such a suburb, I was born.

Overgrown for the most part with a mantle of dark ivy, enclosed in a narrow garden that sloped down to a canal at the back, and shut sullenly away from the road by some three or four dusky elm-trees and a low wall, our home looked dreary and solitary enough—all the more dreary and solitary for the prim terraces and squares by which it was on all sides surrounded. Within, however, it was more cheerful; or custom made it seem so. From the upper windows we saw the Hampstead hills. In the summer our garden was covered with grass, and the lilac bushes blossomed where they leaned towards the canal. Even the shapeless coal-barges that laboured slowly past all the day long had something picturesque and pleasant about them. Besides, no place can be wholly dull where children's feet patter incessantly up and down the stairs, and children's voices ring merrily along the upper floors.

It was a large old house—thrice too large for any use of ours—and we had it all to ourselves. Most of the top rooms were bare; and I well remember what famous playgrounds they made by day, and how we dreaded to pass near them after dark. Up there, even when my father was at home, we might be as noisy as we pleased. It was our especial territory; and, excepting once a year, when the great cleaning campaign was in progress,

no one disputed our prerogative. We were left, indeed, only too much to our own wayward impulses, and grew wildly, like weeds by the wayside.

We were three—Hilda, Jessie, and Barbara. I am Barbara; and the day that gave me life left us all motherless. Our father had not married again. His wife was the one love of his existence, and it seemed, when she was gone, as if the very power of loving were taken from him. Thus it happened that from our first infancy we were left to the sole care of one faithful woman-servant, who spoiled us to her heart's content, and believed that we, like the king, could do no wrong. We called her Goody; but her name was Sarah Beever. We tyrannised over her, of course; and she loved us the more for our tyranny. After all, hers was the only affection we had, and, judicious or injudicious, we should have been poor indeed without it.

Our father's name was Edmund Churchill. He came of a good family; had received a collegiate education; and, it was said, had squandered a considerable fortune in his youth. When nearly arrived at middle life, he married. My mother was not rich—I never even heard that she was beautiful; but he loved her, and, while she lived, endeavoured, after his own fashion, to make her happy.

Too far advanced in years to apply himself to a profession, had even the inclination for work not been wanting, he found himself a hopeless and aimless man. He could not even console himself, like some fathers, in the society and education of his children, for he was not naturally fond of children; and now all the domestic virtues were gone out of him. Wrecked, stupefied, careless alike of the present and the future, he moped away a few dull months, and then, as was natural, returned to the world. He fell in with some of his former friends, now, like himself, grown staid with years; entered a club; took to dinner-parties, politics, and whist; became somewhat of a *bon-vivant;* and, at forty-four, adopted all the small and selfish vices of age. At the time of which I write, he was still handsome, though somewhat stout and florid for his years. He dressed with scrupulous neatness; was particularly careful of his health; and prided himself upon the symmetry of his hands and feet.

His manners, in general, were courteous and cold; yet, in society, he was popular. He possessed, in an eminent degree, the art of pleasing; and I do not remember the day on which he dined at home. Yet, for all this, he was a proud man at heart, and dearly cherished every circumstance that bore upon his name and lineage. An observer might have detected this by only glancing round the

walls of our dusky dining-room, and inspecting the contents of the great old carved bookcase between the windows. Here might be seen a "History of ye Noble and Ancient Houses of Devon," with that page turned down wherein it treated of the Churchills of Ash. Here a copy of that scarce and dreary folio entitled "Divi Brittanici," written and published by Sir Winston Churchill in 1675. Several works on the wars of Queen Anne; five or six different lives of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough; the Duchess of Marlborough's "Private Correspondence;" Chesterfield's letters; Mrs. Manley's "Atalantis;" the "Memoirs of the Count de Grammont;" various old editions of Philips's "Blenheim," and Addison's "Campaign;" the poetical works of Charles Churchill of Westminster; and twenty volumes of the "London Gazette," (said to be of considerable value, and dating from the year 1700 to 1715) filled all the upper shelves, and furnished my father with the only reading in which he ever indulged at home. Nor was this all. A portrait of the brilliant hero, when Lord Churchill, and some fine old engravings of the battles of Ramillies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet, were suspended over the chimney-piece and sideboard. A large coloured print of Blenheim House hung outside in the hall.

But far more impressive than any of these—far more dignified and awful in our childish eyes, was a painting which occupied the place of honour in our best parlour. This work of art purported to be the portrait of a second cousin of my father's, one Agamemnon Churchill by name, a high authority upon all matters connected with the noble science of heraldry, a Knight of the Bath, and one of his Majesty's most honourable heralds. Depicted here in all the glory of his official costume, and looking as like the knave of clubs as if he had just been shuffled out of a gigantic pack of cards, Sir Agamemnon Churchill beamed upon us from the environment of his gilded frame, and filled our little hearts with wonder and admiration. We humbly looked forward to the possibility of some day beholding our illustrious kinsman. We fancied that his rank could be only second to that of King William himself. We even encouraged a secret belief that he might succeed to the throne at some remote time or other; and agreed among ourselves that his first exercise of the royal prerogative would be to create our father Duke of Marlborough; or, at the least, Commander in Chief and Lord Mayor of London.

It was but seldom, however, that we were allowed to contemplate the splendour of Sir Agamemnon and his glittering tabard; for the best

parlour had been a closed room ever since my mother's death, and was only thrown open now and then for cleaning purposes. But this very restriction; this air of mourning and solitude; the darkened windows; the sheeted furniture; the thick white dust that crept in month by month; and, above all, the sense of a mysterious loss which we were all too young to comprehend, only served to invest the room and the picture with a still deeper interest. I well remember how often we interrupted our garden-games to peep, with suspended breath, through the chinks of the closed shutters, and how our voices sunk to a whisper when we passed the door.

I have said that we were three; but I have not yet explained how nearly we were of one age, or how, being the youngest, I was only removed by three years from my eldest sister, Hilda, and by fourteen months from my second sister, Jessie. My father's little girls had, indeed, sprung up quickly around him, and our mother was taken from us at the very time when we most needed her.

Jessie was fair, and somewhat pretty; but Hilda was the beauty of the family, and our father's favourite. She was like him, but darker of complexion, and more delicately featured. She inherited the same pride; was wilful and imperi-

ous; and exercised, withal, after her precocious fashion, the same power of ready fascination. Besides, she was very clever—much cleverer than Jessie or I—and learned with surprising facility. My sister Jessie was in many respects less forward than myself. She had neither Hilda's talent nor my steadiness, and was altogether deficient in ambition. To our eldest sister she was entirely devoted, submitting to all her caprices, and accepting all her opinions with a blind faith worthy of a better cause. This alliance was not favourable to my happiness. Hilda and Jessie were all in all to each other, and I found myself excluded from the confidence of both. Forgetting, or seeming to forget, how little our ages differed, they treated me as a mere baby; called me "little Barbara," and affected to undervalue whatever I said or did. When I tacitly rejected this mortifying patronage, and with it, a companionship which was only offered to me during a game of blind-man's-buff, or puss-in-the-corner, I was reproached for my indifference, or set aside as simply dull and tiresome.

To be just, I do not believe that my sisters had any idea of how they made me suffer. I was too proud to let them see it, and my grief may at times have worn a sullen aspect. Often and often have I stolen away to one of the great upper

rooms, sobbing and lamenting, and wishing that my heart might break and put an end to my sorrows—and yet I kept my secret so bravely that it was not even suspected by the dear old servant whom I loved and trusted above all the world.

The grievances of infancy lie mostly on the surface. Time heals them, and they leave no scar. But this was not my case. I was more sensitive than the generality of children, and, I believe, more affectionate. I could have loved my sisters with my whole heart; but they rejected me, and so the estrangement, which at first might have been healed by a word, widened with years and became at last almost irreparable. By the time that I had reached the age of nine or ten, I was no longer a child. My freshness of feeling was gone—my heart was chilled—my first impulses were checked and driven back. The solitude which was once my refuge became my habit; and, grown indifferent to opinion, I heard myself called "strange and unsociable" without emotion. I appropriated one of the garrets to my special use, and, being left in undisturbed possession, lived there among occupations and amusements of my own creation. Thus it happened that, unless during the hours of meals or tuition, I lived almost entirely alone. My father knew nothing of this; for he was always out, and troubled himself very

little about our domestic managements. Goody knew and wondered, but loved me too well to interfere with anything I chose to do; and my sisters, after teasing and laughing at me to their hearts' content, at last grew weary, and abandoned me to my own solitary ways.

It was a sad life for a child, and might have led to many evils, but for a circumstance which I must ever regard as something more than mere good fortune.

Having wandered upstairs one day with nothing to read and nothing to think of, and being, moreover, very listless and weary, I bethought myself of a pile of old boxes which lay stored together in a certain dark closet close at hand, and so set to work to turn out their contents. Most of them were empty, or contained only coils of rotten rope, pieces of faded stuffs and damasks, and bundles of accounts. But in one, the smallest and least promising of all, I found a dusty treasure. This treasure consisted of some three or four dozen wormeaten, faded volumes, tied up in lots of four or six, and overlaid with blotches of white mould. A motley company! Fox's "Martyrs;" the Works of Dr. Donne; Sir Thomas Browne on "Urn Burial;" a Translation of Pliny, with Illustrations; Defoe's "History of the Plague;" Riccoboni on the Theatres of Europe; "Hudibras;" Waller's

Poems; Bolingbroke's "Letters on English History;" the Tatler, Guardian, and Spectator; Drelincourt on Death, with the History of Mrs. Veal; an odd volume or two of the Gentleman's Magazine, and some few others, chiefly farming books and sermons. It was a quaint library for so young a reader, but a most welcome one. I necessarily met with much that I could not understand, and yet contrived to reap pleasure and profit from all. I had boundless faith to begin with, and believed, like the Arabs, that everything printed must be true. I was puzzled by Sir Hudibras, but never doubted either his courage or identity. I was interested by the letters in the Tatler, and only wondered that so many ladies and gentlemen should have ventured to trouble that nice good-natured Mr. Bickerstaff with their unimportant private affairs. As for Edmund Waller, Esquire, I was quite sorry for his distresses; and could not conceive how the beautiful Sacharissa could bear to be told that she had "a wild and cruel soul" without relenting immediately. To me, happy in my credulity, the Phœnix and Mrs. Veal were alike genuine phenomena; and had Sir Agamemnon Churchill himself attempted to convince me that the History of the Plague was written by any other than "a citizen who lived the whole time in London," I should

have made bold to reserve my own opinion on the subject.

Other books I had as well—books better suited to my age and capacity; but these, being common property, were kept in the school-room, and consisted for the most part of moral tales and travels, which, read more than once, grow stale and wearisome.

Fortunate was it that I found this second life in my books; for I was a very lonely little girl, with a heart full of unbestowed affection, and a nature quickly swayed to smiles or tears. The personages of my fictitious world became as real to me as those by whom I was surrounded in my daily life. They linked me with humanity. They were my friends, my instructors, my companions. I loved some, and hated others, as cordially as if they could love or hate me in return; and, in the intensity of my sympathy with their airy sorrows and perplexities, learned to forget my own.

But I had still another happiness—a half-developed taste, which, fed by such scant nutriment as fell now and then in my way, ripened, year after year, to a deep and earnest passion, and influenced beyond all calculation the destinies of my later life. Art—art called the Divine, but known to me under its meanest and most barren form—fed the dreams of my childhood, and invested with an

undeserved interest the few wretched prints scattered here and there through the pages of Fox's Martyrs, Goldsmith's Geography, and other works of the same "mark and likelihood." Sometimes, after my own imperfect fashion, I strove to reproduce them in pencil or charcoal. Sometimes, even, I attempted to illustrate the adventures of my favourite heroes, or the landscapes described in books of travel. The whitewashed walls of my garret, the covers and margins of my copy-books, and all the spare scraps of paper that I could find, were scrawled over with designs in which the love of beauty might, perhaps, have been discernible; but in which every rule of anatomy, perspective, and probability was hopelessly set at naught. But of this, more hereafter.

Happy art thou, O little child, to whom is granted the guidance of loving parents! Happy, thrice happy, in the fond encouragements, the gentle reproofs, the tender confidences and consolations lavished on thy first uncertain years! I lost one of mine before my lips had ever been hallowed by her kisses; and by the other I was, if not wholly unloved, at least too much neglected. How I yearned and wearied for those affections that I now could never have; how I used to steal to dear old Goody's knees in the dim twilight, and beseech her to tell me something of my mother; how I

listened with tears that I was ashamed to show, and stole away to hide them; how, thinking over all these things, I sometimes gave way to fits of bitterness and anger, and sometimes sobbed myself to sleep, with my head resting on a book, matters little now, and, except as it may throw a light on certain passages of my inner life, is scarcely deserving of mention. Alas! I have yet much more to tell. The long story of my workings and wanderings lies all before me like a summer landscape, with its lights and shadows, its toilsome plains, and its places of green rest, mapped out, and fading away together in the blue distance.

Here, at all events, let me end my first day's record; for I am weary, and these pictures of the past lie heavily at my heart.

CHAPTER II.

DEPORTMENT AND DISCIPLINE.

My father's bell rang sharply.

It was about eleven o'clock on a brilliant May morning. Miss Whymper, who attended to our education between the hours of nine and twelve daily, presided at the head of the table, correcting French exercises. We, respectfully withdrawn to the foot of the same, bent busily over our books and slates, and preserved a decorous silence. We all heard our father close his bed-room door and go downstairs; but it was his habit to rise and breakfast late, and we took no notice of it. We also heard him ring; but we took no notice of that either. Scarcely, however, had the echo of the first bell died away, when it was succeeded by a second, and the second was still pealing when he opened the parlour door, and called aloud.

"Beever!" said he, impatiently. "Beever! am I to ring for an hour?"

The reply was inaudible; but he spoke again, almost without waiting to hear it.

"When did this letter arrive? Was it here last night when I came home, or was it delivered only this morning? Why didn't you bring it up to me with the shaving-water? Where is Barbara?"

Startled at the sound of my own name, I rose in my place, and waited with suspended breath. My sisters, with their heads still bent low, glanced first at me and then at each other.

"Be so good, Miss Barbara, as to concentrate your attention upon your studies," said Miss Whymper, without even raising her eyes from the exercises.

"I—I—that is, papa—I heard . . ."

"Be so good as to hear nothing during the hours of education," interposed Miss Whymper, still frostily intent upon the page before her.

"But papa calls me, and . . ."

"In that case you will be sent for. We will proceed, if you please, young ladies, to the analysation of the Idiom."

We pushed our slates away, took each our French grammar, and prepared to listen.

"The Idiom," said Miss Whymper, sitting stiffly upright, and, as was her wont, cadencing her voice

to one low monotonous level, "is a familiar and arbitrary turn of words, which, without being in strict accordance with the received laws of . . ."

"Barbara! Barbara, come here. Tell Miss Whymper I want you!"

I started up again, and Miss Whymper, interrupted in her discourse, frowned, inclined her head the very least in the world, and said:—

"You have my permission, Miss Barbara, to retire."

I was always nervous in my father's presence; but the suddenness and strangeness of the summons made me this morning more than usually timid. I ran down, however, and presented myself, tremblingly, at the door of the breakfast-parlour. He was pacing to and fro, between the table and the window. His coffee stood untasted in the cup. In his hand he crushed an open letter. Seeing me at the door, he stopped, flung himself into his easy chair, and beckoned me to come nearer.

"Stand there, Barbara," said he, pointing to a particular square in the pattern of the carpet.

Shaking from head to foot, I came forward and stood there, waiting, like a criminal for his sentence.

"Humph! Can't you look up?"

I looked up; looked down again; turned red and

white alternately; and felt as if the ground were slipping from under my feet.

My father uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"Good heavens!" said he, pettishly. "What *gaucherie!* Are you taught to hold yourself no better than that? Are your arms pump-handles? What stranger would imagine—well, well, it can't be helped now! Tell me—did you ever hear of your great-aunt, who lives in Suffolk?"

"Heard of Mrs. Sandyshaft!" exclaimed Goody, who had been standing by the door, twirling her apron with both hands all the time. "I should think so indeed! Often and often; and of Stoneycroft Hall, too—haven't you, my lamb?"

Too confused to speak, I nodded; and my father went on.

"I have had a letter from your great-aunt this morning, Barbara. Here it is. She asks me to send you down to Suffolk; and, as it may be greatly for your good, I shall allow you to go. Though at a great inconvenience to myself, remember. At a great inconvenience to myself."

Uncertain what to reply, I looked down, and stammered:—

"Yes, papa."

"I have not seen Mrs. Sandyshaft for many years," continued my father. "In fact, we—we

have not been friends. But she may take a liking for you, Barbara—and she is rich. You must try to please her. You will go this day week, if Beever can get you ready in the time. What do you say, Beever?"

"Less than a week will do for me, sir," said Goody, promptly.

"No, no; a week is soon enough. And, Beever, you are not to spare for a pound or two. I must have her look like a gentleman's child, anyhow. Not but that it is excessively inconvenient to me, just now. Excessively inconvenient!"

He paused, musingly, and then, leaning his chin upon his hand, looked at me again, and sighed. The sight, I suppose, was unsatisfactory enough; for the longer he looked, the more his countenance darkened. Suddenly he rose, pushed his chair away, and planted himself in the middle of the hearth-rug with his back to the fire.

"My compliments to Miss Whymper, Beever, and I request the favour of a moment's conversation."

Beever departed on her errand. After a few seconds of uneasy silence, during which I never ventured to stir from that particular square upon the carpet, Miss Whymper came.

My father bowed profoundly. Miss Whymper

curtsied to the ground. I always noticed that they were amazingly polite to each other.

"Madam," said my father with his grandest air, and in his blandest accents, "unwilling as I am to trespass on your valuable time, I have ventured to interrupt you this morning in order to consult you upon... Barbara, place a chair for Miss Whymper."

Miss Whymper curtsied again, laid her head a little on one side, like a raven, and folded her hands together, as if she were expressing the letter M in the manual alphabet.

"I propose, madam," pursued my father, "to send Barbara on a visit to a relation—a rich and somewhat eccentric relation—who resides in the country, and with whom we have not held communication for many years. It is important, for several reasons, Miss Whymper, that the child should make a favourable impression; and I feel sure that I shall not vainly entreat your co-operation during the few days that intervene between the present time and the period of her departure."

"With regard to anything that *I* can do," murmured Miss Whymper, patting her hands softly together, as if she were applauding, "Mr. Churchill may at all times command me."

My father glanced at Miss Whymper's hands, which were somewhat red and bony, and at his

own, which were particularly white and well shaped; and so, trifling carelessly with his watch-chain, continued.

"I am aware, of course," said he, "that much cannot be done in so short a time; but that something may, I am induced to hope, knowing—ahem! —the talent and judgment to which I confide the task."

Miss Whymper smiled the iciest of smiles, and acknowledged the tribute by another bow, which my father returned immediately.

"You observe, no doubt, Miss Whymper," he continued, "that Barbara's carriage is essentially ungraceful. She never knows what to do with her feet. Her hands do not seem to belong to her. She enters a room badly. She has no self-possession, no style, no address—in short, there is nothing in her appearance which indicates either good blood or good breeding."

Whereupon my father glanced over his shoulder at the chimney-glass, and paused for a reply. Miss Whymper, perceiving that I had withdrawn behind her chair, as much out of sight as possible, shifted her position, and considered me attentively.

"It is quite true, sir," she sighed, after a few minutes of silence. "She is lamentably awkward! And yet her sister Hilda . . ."

"Ah! if it had been Hilda!" exclaimed my father, regretfully. "Why could she not have invited Hilda?"

"So quick, so naturally graceful, such rapid perception!" murmured Miss Whymper, still noiselessly applauding.

"The only one of the three who is like me!" added my father, with another glance at the glass.

"A truly aristocratic cast of features," returned Miss Whymper, "and the very child to please a stranger! Well, well—we may do something with Miss Barbara, after all; and, perhaps, by confining our attention for the present to that one object . . ."

"Precisely so, Madam. That is what I wish."

"And, if Mr. Churchill entertains no objection, by employing the aid of a few calisthenic exercises . . ."

"Just so, Miss Whymper. Just so."

"I do not doubt being enabled to effect some slight improvement."

"In which case, Madam, you will confer a favour upon me."

"And should any trifling outlay be required . . ."

"You will charge whatever is necessary to my account."

"A back-board, for instance, and a pair of dumb-bells?"

"I leave everything, Miss Whymper, to your experience and discretion."

The tone in which my father uttered these last words, and the bow by which they were accompanied, concluded the interview. Miss Whymper rose; he held the door open while she passed through; more bows and curtsies were exchanged, and, when she was gone, he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and flung himself once more into the easy chair.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, "governesses and children—necessary evils! Barbara, you may go back to your lessons, and tell Beever to bring fresh coffee."

The result of this conversation was to make my life unbearably wretched for the next seven days. I was taught to walk, to stand, to shake hands. I stood in the stocks, and wore the back-board, till I was ready to faint. I was placed before a looking-glass, and made to curtsey to my own reflection for the half hour together. I went through the first interview with my great-aunt twenty times a day; my great-aunt being represented by a chair, and Miss Whymper standing by to conduct the performance. All this was very painful and perplexing, and, at the same time, very ludicrous. As for Hilda and Jessie, they allowed me no peace from morning till night; but, when our governess

was out of the way, mimicked me with elaborate salutations, enquired perpetually after my health and that of my great-aunt, and humbly hoped that when I had inherited Stoneycroft Hall, and become a grand lady, I should not be too proud to take notice of my poor relations!

Thus the weary week went by, and but for dear old Goody, who comforted and consoled me under all my trials, I hardly know how I could have gone through it. Go through it I did, however; and, drilled and dislocated to the uttermost verge of endurance, hailed with a blessed sense of coming liberty the morning of my departure.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE ROAD.

SEATED in a corner of the Suffolk Stage, with Goody clinging in an agony of tears to the door, and the guard insisting that she must get down, as the coach is going immediately, I feel that I am, indeed, a very lonely little traveller. I have left so early that no one in the house was awake to bid me good-bye; I have scarcely slept at all throughout the night; and I have eaten no breakfast. Worse than all, my firmness is fast oozing away, and there is a lump in my throat that will surely break into sobs with the next word I utter.

"Now, ma'am, for the last time, if *you* please," says the guard, impatiently.

"Eighty mile and more!" sobs Goody, clinging all the faster. "Oh! my dear lamb, eighty mile and more!"

"Well, it's your own choice," growls the guard, with an oath and a scowl, as he clambers to his seat. "You'll be thrown off the step, as sure as you're a Christian woman!"

Whereupon she smothers me in one last frantic embrace, and, being wrenched away by a humane bystander, disappears suddenly—only to re-appear, however, as suddenly; and, as the coach starts, to cry:

"Good-bye! good-bye! my darling! Eat your money, and take care of your sandwiches!"

Having no voice to answer, I can only hang from the window and wave my hand. We plunge out of the inn-yard and into the busy street beyond —the guard blows his horn—the loungers give a shout—and, looking after her to the last, I catch one parting glimpse of Goody in insane pursuit. Then a crowd of vehicles intervenes; we whirl sharply round a corner; and there is nothing left for me but to shrink back in my place and weep silently.

A long time goes by thus. My fellow-travellers, who are four in number and seem all to belong to one family, talk loudly among themselves, and take no notice of me. Looking up, by-and-bye, when my first anguish has somewhat abated, I observe that they consist of a father, mother, and two daughters, all very cheerful and good-tempered-

looking, and all busily engaged in the consumption of stout sausage rolls. Being pressed to accept one of these, and, to my shame, bursting into another flood of tears with the effort of declining it, I turn my face to the window, and they considerately speak to me no more.

The morning is cold and grey, and a melancholy damp, which is half rain, half fog, clings to the panes, and makes the prospect ghostly. We are not yet out of the great suburbs; but the houses, which run mostly in terraces, have an out-of-town look, and are presently succeeded by groups of twin-villas with gaps of market gardens between. Then come brick-fields, villas half built up, patches of waste ground, and lines of dreary pasture, which, seen through the drizzling mist, look more dismal than the streets.

Struck with the silence that has succeeded to the brisk conversation with which they began the journey, I venture once again to glance at my companions, and find that they have all four fallen asleep, with their heads tied up in pocket handkerchiefs—a proceeding so sensible and contagious, that I presently find myself also getting drowsy, and, before many minutes are past, have forgotten my troubles in a deep and dreamless slumber. Not having rested all the night before, I now sleep heavily—so heavily that nothing less than the

opening of the door and the entrance of the sixth passenger (whose place has all this time been vacant) awakens me. It is now close upon midday. The mist has cleared off; the sun shines out gloriously; the sky is islanded with great solitary clouds; there are trees and trim hedges on either side of the road; and the country all about is green and pleasant. We are running on briskly, at the rate of ten miles an hour—so, at least, our last traveller observes—and the village at which we took him up is already left far behind.

"Ten mile an hour, a fine day, and five a-greeable companions (four of 'em ladies)," says the new comer, with a sniff at every comma, "what can the 'art of man desire more!"

He is a plump, smooth-shaven individual, with an unhealthy complexion, a black suit, a white neck-cloth, and a brown cotton umbrella. Despite the complacent smile with which he looks round upon the company, he is not by any means attractive, and nobody seems disposed to improve his acquaintance.

"Except conversation," he adds, after a long pause. "Yea—except godly conversation."

A dead silence follows, during which he smiles and looks round, as before.

"And godly conversation," says he, at the end of another interval, "is the refreshment of the sperrit."

Still no one answers, and this time the omission can hardly be misconstrued. By the fading of his ugly smile, and the gloom that gathers gradually about his heavy brow, it is plain that he sees the unpleasant truth at last. Finding presently that the father and daughters have resumed their chat in whispers, and that the mother has turned directly away from him, he pulls a greasy book from his pocket, lolls back in his place, and reads sullenly.

Thoroughly amused by the incidents of the road, and delighted with the country, I watch everything that passes, and soon forget all about my travelling companions. The green fields rippling over with young wheat—the snug farm-houses, set round with yellow stacks and mossy barns—the wayside pond with its fleet of callow ducklings—the grey church tower that peeps above the willows—the weary pedlar resting by the cross roads, with his bundle at his feet—the solitary inn, with its swinging sign, its old worn trough, and its sunburnt ostler lounging at the door—the travelling caravan that labours on with smoking chimney and close-shut windows, and is so soon left out of sight—the stretch of furzy common—the bridge where boys are angling—the drove of frantic pigs that rush under our very wheels, and seem bent on suicide—the plantations, mansions, toll-gates, wag-

gons; in short, all these sights and sounds of country life fill my mind with pleasant pictures, and my heart with gladness.

Rattling at hot noon into a clean, bright, busy town, where it is market-day and the streets are thronged with farmers, we dash up to a large inn called the "Rose and Crown," and halt to dine. Having my basket of sandwiches at my feet, and being, besides, somewhat shy of the inn and the strange people, I remain in the coach alone; but the cheerful family hurry away as briskly as if the stout sausage-rolls had appealed only to their imaginations, and the sleek stranger saunters blandly up and down the yard under the shadow of his cotton umbrella. Seeing me engaged, shortly after, on the contents of my basket, he hovers about the door, smiles, lingers, and looks interested.

"What are your sandwiches made of, my dear?" he asks at length. "Ham or beef?"

"Beef, sir," I reply, colouring painfully.

The stranger smacks his lips.

"Dear me!" says he meditatively. "Only to think that they are beef! Why, I guessed they were beef from the beginning! They look very nice."

Scarcely knowing whether it be polite to do so, and fearful at the same time of offending this gentleman's delicacy, I hold out the basket with a

timid hand, and try to falter forth some words of invitation. To my surprise, he accepts immediately; and not only accepts, but steps straightway into the coach, takes my basket on his knees, and, to show how little pride he has, helps himself as liberally to my sandwiches as though they had been his own. Thus powerfully aided, I soon arrive at the end of my dinner, and, somehow or another, leave off almost as hungry as when I began.

A sudden running to and fro, clattering of hoofs, and crowding up of passengers, now indicates the renewal of our journey. The cheerful family hurries back, looking very warm and contented. The coachman clambers to the box, and has his last glass of ale handed up to him. The guard sounds a farewell blast; and away we go again, across the market-hill, and out past the bank and the prison, and on once more along the dusty high road, with the fields on either side.

What, with the pleasant monotony of the landscape, and the heat of the sunny summer's day, and the general drowsiness of these and other influences, we are a very sleepy company this afternoon, and, unconsciously polite, nod to each other incessantly. At about four o'clock we come to a large town, where my cheerful neighbours are met by a roomy double-bodied chaise, and all shake

hand with me at parting. Not so the sleek traveller, who, unmindful of the sandwiches, jumps out, as the coach stops, and goes his way without a word.

Handsome shops, wide streets, picturesque old houses, with projecting stories richly carved, solid public buildings, and glimpses of a noble river fringed with trees and villas, impress me with admiration as we pass, and make up a total that is more than commonly attractive. Having delayed here full half an hour, we start away again; and, just as we begin to move, I hear it said that the name of this town is Ipswich.

Being, by this time, very tired and hungry, and quite alone in the coach, I fall asleep once more, and, waking bewildered at every change of horses, forget where I am, and whither I am going. Sometimes, possessed with a vague notion that I must have slept for hours and passed the place long since, I start up in terror, and cry to be let out; but that is when we are going at full speed, and no one hears me. Thus two more weary hours lag by, seeming as long as all the other hours of the day together; and then, just as dusk is coming on, we pass through a straggling village, where the blacksmith's forge burns redly, and the children in the ivied school-house are chanting an evening hymn. Dashing on between the straggling cot-

tages, and up a hill so closely shaded by thick trees, that the dusk seems to thicken suddenly to night, we draw up all at once before a great open gate, leading to a house of which I can only see the gabled outline and the lighted windows.

The guard jumps down; the door is thrown open; and two persons, a man and a woman, come hurrying down the path.

"One little girl, and one box, as per book," says the guard, lifting me out, and setting me down in the road, as if I were but another box, to be delivered as directed.

"From London?" asks the woman, sharply.

"From London," replies the guard, already scrambling to his seat. "All right, ain't it?"

"All right."

Whereupon the coach plunges on again into the dusk; the man shoulders my box as though it were a feather; and the woman, who looks strangely gaunt and grey by this uncertain light, seizes me by the wrist, and strides away towards the house at a pace that my cramped and weary limbs can scarcely accomplish.

Sick and bewildered, I am hurried into a cheerful room where the table is spread as if for tea and supper, and a delicious perfume of coffee and fresh flowers fills the air; and—and, all at once, even in the moment when I am first observing

them, these sights and scents grow all confused and sink away together, and I remember nothing.

How long my unconsciousness may have lasted I know not; but when I recover, I find myself laid upon a sofa, with my cloak and bonnet off, my eyes and mouth full of Eau de Cologne, and my hands smarting under a volley of slaps, administered by a ruddy young woman on one side, and by the same gaunt person who brought me from the coach, on the other. Seeing me look up, they both desist; and the latter, drawing back a step or two, as if to observe me to greater advantage, puts on an immense pair of heavy gold spectacles, stares steadily for some seconds, and at length says:—

"What did you mean by that, now?"

Unprepared for so abrupt a question, I lie as if fascinated by her bright grey eyes, and cannot utter a syllable.

"Are you better?"

Still silent, I bow my head feebly, and keep looking at her.

"Hey, now! Am I a basilisk? Are you dumb, child?"

Wondering why she speaks to me thus, and being moreover, so very weak and tired, what can I do but try in vain to answer, and, failing in the effort,

burst into tears again? Hereupon she frowns, pulls off her glasses, shakes her head angrily, and, saying—"That's done to aggravate me—I know it is!"—stalks away to the window, and stands there grimly, looking out upon the night. The younger woman, however, with a world of kindness in her rosy face, touches my wet cheeks tenderly with her rough hands, dries my tears upon her apron, and, bending low with her finger to her lips, whispers me "not to cry."

"That child's hungry," says the other, coming suddenly back. "That's what's the matter with her. She's hungry. I know she is, and I won't be contradicted. Do you hear me, Jane?—I won't be contradicted."

"Indeed, ma'am, I think she is hungry," replies Jane. "And tired, too, poor little thing!"

"Tired and hungry ... Mercy alive! then why don't she eat? Here's food enough for a dozen people! Child, what will you have? Ham—cold chicken-pie—bread—butter—cheese—tea—coffee—ale?"

Too faint to speak aloud even now, I rather express the word "Coffee" by the motion of my lips than whisper it; and, having done this, lie back wearily and close my eyes.

The first step is the great effort; but, being fed and waited upon by the younger woman, I soon

get better and braver, and am able to sit up and be helped to a slice of chicken pie. From pie to ham, from ham to a second cup of coffee, and from the second cup of coffee to more pie, are transitions easily understood, and pleasantly accomplished. Everything tastes delicious; and not even the sight of the gaunt housekeeper, who sits all the time at the opposite side of the table with her chin resting in the palms of her hands, and her eyes fixed immovably upon me, has power to spoil my enjoyment.

For she is the housekeeper, beyond a doubt. Those heavy gold spectacles, that sad-coloured gown, that cap with its plain, close bordering, can belong to no one but a housekeeper. Wondering within myself why she should be so disagreeable; and why, being so disagreeable, my aunt should keep her in her service; then wondering where my aunt herself can be; why she has not yet come to welcome me; how she will receive me when she does come; and whether I shall have presence of mind enough to remember all the curtseys I have been drilled to make, and all the speeches I have been taught to say, I find myself eating as if nothing at all had been the matter with me, and even staring now and then quite confidently at my opposite neighbour.

My meal over, and the funereal silence, in which

it has been conducted, remaining still unbroken, Jane clears the table, closes out the dark night, trims the lamp, wheels my sofa over to the fireside and is seen no more. Left alone now with the sleeping dogs and the housekeeper—who looks as if she never slept in her life—I find the evening wearisome. Observing, too, that she continues to look at me in the same grim, imperturbable way, and seeing no books anywhere about, it occurs to me that a little conversation would, perhaps, be acceptable; and that, as I am her mistress's niece, it is my place to speak first.

"If you please, ma'am," I begin, after a long hesitation.

"HEY!"

Somewhat disconcerted by the sharpness and suddenness of this interruption, I pause, and take some moments to recover myself.

"If you please, ma'am, when am I to see my aunt?"

"Hey? What? Who?"

"My aunt, if you please, ma'am."

"Mercy alive! And pray who do you suppose I am?"

"You, ma'am," I falter, with a vague uneasiness impossible to describe. "Are you—are you not the housekeeper?"

To say that she glares vacantly at me from be-

hind her spectacles, loses her very power of speech, and grows, all at once, quite stiff and rigid in her chair, is to convey but a faint picture of the amazement with which she receives this observation.

"I!" she gasps at length. "I! Gracious me, child!—*I* am your aunt."

I feel my countenance become an utter blank. I am conscious of turning red and white, hot and cold, all in one moment. My ears tingle; my heart sinks within me; I can neither speak nor think. A dreadful silence follows, and in the midst of this silence, my aunt, without any kind of warning, burst into a grim laugh, and says:—

"Barbara, come and kiss me."

I could have kissed a kangaroo just then, in the intensity of my relief; and so, getting up quite readily, touch her gaunt cheek with my childish lips, and look the gratitude I dare not speak. To my surprise, she draws me closer to her knee, passes one thin hand idly through my hair, looks, not unkindly, into my wondering eyes, and murmurs, more to herself than me, the name of "Barbara!"

This gentle mood, however, is soon dismissed; and, as if ashamed of having indulged it, she pushes me away, frowns, shakes her head, and says, quite angrily:—

"Nonsense, child. Nonsense! It's time you went to bed."

And so, with Jane's good help, to bed I go, and thankfully, too; for I never was so weary in my life.

It is a large room, and a large bed stands in the centre of it—a bed so soft and so extensive that I disappear altogether in its mighty depths, and am lost till morning.

CHAPTER IV.

MY AUNT AND I BECOME BETTER ACQUAINTED.

"Jours naïfs, plaisirs purs, emportés par le temps!"
J. REBOUL.

"YOUR name," said my aunt, with a little off-hand nod, "is Bab. Remember that."

She looked grimmer than ever, sitting up so stiffly behind the tea-urn; and this was all the morning salutation she vouchsafed me. A vacant chair awaited me at the foot of the table—such a chair! It had a high, straight, carved back, and huge elbows, to which my chin just reached, and legs like bed-posts, which, as they were very long, and mine very short, left my feet dangling half a yard from the ground. Unpleasantly conscious of my own diminutiveness, and still more unpleasantly conscious of my aunt's keen eyes, I endea-

voured to fill this piece of furniture as best I could, and to look as tall as possible.

"Bab," said my aunt, "what made you take me for the housekeeper?"

I had begun breakfast with a tolerable appreciation of the good things before me; but this question took away my appetite at a blow.

"I—I—I don't know, ma'am," I replied, falteringly.

"Nonsense, Bab. You know well enough. I see it in your face—and I won't be contradicted!"

"If—if you please, ma'am . . ."

"No, I don't please. What made you take me for the housekeeper? Was it my dress?"

"Yes, ma'am, I think so."

"Too shabby—hey?"

"N-no, ma'am—not shabby; but . . ."

"But what? You must learn to speak out, Bab. I hate people who hesitate."

"But papa said you were so rich, and . . ."

"Ah! He said I was rich, did he? Rich! Oho! And what more, Bab? What more? Rich indeed! Come, you must tell me! What else did he say when he told you I was rich?"

"N-n-nothing more, ma'am," I replied, startled and confused by her sudden vehemence. "Indeed, nothing more."

"Bab," said my aunt, bringing her hand down upon the table so heavily that the cups and saucers rang again, "Bab, that's false. If he told you I was rich, he told you how to get my money by-and-by! He told you to cringe, and fawn, and pay court to me—to worm yourself into my favour—to profit by my death—to be a liar, a flatterer, and a beggar! And why? Because I am rich! Oh, yes! because I am rich!"

I sat as if stricken into stone; but half comprehending what she meant, and unable to answer a syllable.

"Rich, indeed!" she went on, excited more and more by her own words, and stalking to and fro between the window and the table, like one possessed. "Aha! we shall see! We shall see! Listen to me, child. I shall leave you nothing—not a farthing! Never expect it—never hope for it! If you are good, and true, and I like you, I shall be a friend to you while I live; but if you are mean, and false, and tell me lies, I shall despise you—do you hear? I shall despise you—send you home—never speak to you, or look at you again! Either way, you will get nothing by my death! Nothing—nothing—nothing!"

My heart swelled within me—I shook from head to foot—I tried to speak, and the words seemed to choke me.

"I don't want it!" I cried, passionately. "I—I am not mean! I have told no lies—not one!"

My aunt stopped short, and looked sternly down upon me, as if she would read my very soul.

"Bab," said she, "do you mean to tell me that your father said nothing to you about why I may have asked you here, or what might come of it? Nothing? Not a word?"

"He said it might be for my good—he told Miss Whymper to make me curtsey and walk better, and come into a room properly—he said he wished me to please you. That was all! He never spoke of money, or of dying, or of telling lies—never!"

"Well, then, he meant it!" retorted my aunt, sharply. "He meant it!"

Flushed and trembling in my childish anger, I sprang from my chair and stood before her, face to face.

"He did *not* mean it!" I cried. "How dare you speak so of Papa? How dare . . ."

I could say no more, but, terrified at my own impetuosity, faltered, covered my face with both hands, and burst into an agony of sobs.

"Bab," said my aunt, in an altered voice, "little Bab!" and took me all at once in her two arms, and kissed me on the forehead.

My anger was gone in a moment. Something

in her tone, in her kiss, in my own heart, called up a quick response; and, nestling close in her embrace, I wept passionately. Then she sat down, drew me on her knee, smoothed my hair with her hand, and comforted me as if I had been a little baby.

"So brave," said she, "so proud, so honest! Come, little Bab, you and I must be friends."

And we were friends, from that minute; for, from that minute, a mutual confidence and love sprang up between us. Too deeply moved to answer her in words, I only clung the closer, and tried to still my sobs. She understood me.

"Come," said she, after a few seconds of silence. "Let's go and see the pigs."

And with this she disengaged my arms from about her neck, set me down abruptly, and rang the bell.

"My pigs, Bab," said she, "are my hobby. I've a hundred of them out yonder, waiting to be fed. I always keep a hundred, and I see them fed myself, twice a-day. Won't you like to go with me?"

"Oh! yes, ma'am, very much."

"Don't call me *ma'am*. I don't like it. Call me aunt. Jane, bring my boots and whip."

The whip was a short strong whip, with a leather thong, and the boots were the most amazing boots

I ever saw. Jane brought them, quite as a matter of course, and my aunt put them on. They had iron heels, and soles half-an-inch thick, and reached, moreover, a long way above her ancles. They looked as though they might have been Wellingtons, originally, cut a trifle shorter, and opened down the fronts to admit of being buttoned. These on, my aunt proceeded to tie up the skirt of her dress all round, and completed her toilette by the addition of a huge green silk bonnet and veil, which hung on a peg in the hall.

"You see, Bab," said she, "I am a farmer. My property lies in farms. I cultivate this one, and I let the rest. I attend to my business myself; and as I never do anything by halves, I buy, sell, go to market, keep my own books, and trust to nobody's eyes but my own. Some folks laugh about it; but I let them laugh, and wish them better amusement. This is my orchard, and yonder is the stack-yard; but we are not going there just now. The pigs are waiting."

Saying which, my aunt led the way across a broad grassy space, where the turkeys were strutting along with their heads in the air, and the hens were cackling about with broods of little yellow chickens at their heels, and the fruit trees made a green shade overhead. I could have stayed in this delightful place for hours; but my aunt took

me through a little gate to the left, and across a yard where a boy was chopping wood, and then through another gate into another yard which was littered all over with straw, and built round with neat brick sties, and as full of pigs as ever it could hold.

"There they are!" said she, with grim satisfaction. "There they are!"

There they were, indeed—pigs of all sizes, ages, and tempers. Black pigs, white pigs, spotted pigs, little pigs, big pigs, fat pigs, lean pigs, pigs with curly tails, and pigs with no tails at all. Quiet enough till we came into the yard, they no sooner beheld my aunt's green bonnet than they broke into the most appalling chorus imaginable, and came rushing up to us with an alacrity that soon brought the whip into service, and sent some of them shrieking away. But to see them fed was the great sight—to watch the perpetual replenishment of the great round troughs; the circles of tails, uplifted and quivering with excitement; the playful disturbances that broke out now and then among the younger members of the company, and the friendly bites, flights and scuffles that diversified the graver interests of the performance.

Meanwhile, my aunt stalked about with her whip in her hand; inspected the condition of the sties, and the quality of the food; rated the farm-servants;

discussed the question of bean-meal and pea-meal; gave orders that one youthful family should have their noses ringed; condemned two hapless porkers of middle growth to solitary confinement; and ended by taking me round to visit a very fierce dowager in an adjoining yard, who had the evening before presented society with no less than fifteen little ones, as black as jet, and not much bigger than kittens.

Having dismissed the pigs, we went into the stables; and then round to the bullock yard; and, after that, went a long way off to a clover-field lying on the slope of a hill, where we saw the sheep and the little white lambs all feeding and gambolling about, to the number of three hundred and more. And throughout all this ramble, my aunt's vigilant eyes were on everything and everybody. Nothing escaped her; and not a servant on all the land but started into activity at her approach, and seemed to regard her not only with respect, but with some degree of terror.

At twelve o'clock we came home to lunch; at four we dined; and after dinner, my aunt put the Times into my hands, and desired me to read the debates while she sat and knitted in her easy chair. It was not amusing, but I acquitted myself creditably, and was praised for my enunciation. Having had tea at seven, we strolled about the

gardens and orchard till nearly nine; and then I was sent to bed. Such was my first day at Stoneycroft Hall; and such was every day for weeks and months after. Sometimes we spent an evening at the parsonage—sometimes the vicar or the doctor dropped in to tea; but, with these slight variations, the programme remained unaltered. After a few weeks, my aunt taught me the leading rules of whist, and we played at double-dummy regularly for an hour after tea. It was a quiet life, but a very happy one—all the happier for its monotony, and all the pleasanter for its seclusion. The calm, the good air, the early hours, and all the circumstances of the change, seemed to strengthen and improve me. Every sight and sound of farm-yard or field delighted me. Every hour was a holiday—every breath enjoyment. Cured of my solitary habits, I grew daily more fresh and childlike, and more accessible to pleasant influences. To be released from Miss Whymper's government and my sisters' petty tyranny was much; but to live amongst green trees and kindly faces was even more. Day by day, my aunt and I became better acquainted—day by day I loved her and the old house, and all the surroundings of the place, more and more dearly. And this reminds me that I have not yet described Stoneycroft Hall.

Why it should ever have been called Stoney-

croft Hall was altogether a mystery. A more inappropriate name could scarcely have been found for it, since it was justified by no trace of barrenness, by no poverty of soil, by no fragment of rock or boulder anywhere about. On the contrary, it would have been difficult to find in all the county a district more productive, or more highly cultivated. The great heaths, it is true, were in the neighbourhood—vast sweeps of undulating moorland many miles in length, which traversed twelve or fourteen parishes, and ended at last upon that wave-worn coast where the tides of the German ocean ebb and flow between England and the shores of Holland. But these heaths lay at a considerable distance, and were not within sight from even our uppermost windows. They might have been a hundred miles away, for any show of waste land thereabout, and could scarcely have influenced the naming of Stoneycroft Hall.

It was a fine old Elizabethan homestead, and, in spite of its hard name, the very type of an ample, hospitable English dwelling. A little formal pencil sketch which I made of the place a few days after my first arrival, lies before me as I write. Meagre and childlike though it be, it yet brings back every quaint carving, every curved gable, twisted chimney, and fantastic weathercock, as vividly as though they were the impres-

sions of yesterday. There is the dear old porch with its environment of red and amber roses—there the window of my great formal bed-chamber —there the garret whither I so often stole away with my pencil and my books, and, from its narrow casement, watched the harmless lightnings of the summer dusk. Far and away, all round about the house, studded by farm-buildings, varied by slopes and hollows, relieved by patches of brown fallow and tracts of radiant green, lay the pleasant Suffolk landscape. Our garden-gate opened on the highway—the church-spire peeped above the pollard-oaks close by—the pound stood in a grassy angle a few yards down the road. To the left (sheltered by a group of picturesque old trees, with knotted roots, and weird, wild-looking branches), lay the great pond, where the cattle were driven in to water every evening, and many a traveller stayed his horse to drink. To the right, we were enclosed by the stacks and out-houses. To the westward, skirting a ridge of rising-ground and filling the valley beyond with rich masses of rounded foliage, extended the park and preserves of Broomhill; while, farther away, in the midst of a stretch of open country, a bare gaunt poplar, with its lower branches lopped and only a few stray leaves left fluttering at the top, started up to an unusual height, and served as

one of the landmarks of the place. Concealed amid the plantations behind it, nestled a small white building, known as the Poplar Farm.

Such was the house, and such the neighbourhood in which my aunt resided. It was no unusual scene. It would have interested the painter less than the agriculturist, and by many, perhaps, have been deemed but a tame specimen of even so tame a county as Suffolk. But I loved it. It possessed for me, at that impressionable age, a novelty and a charm beyond the power of words to utter. I studied it with a painter's instinct under every aspect of the year and all the moods of nature. Every thatched roof, every column of blue smoke, every lane, and drift, and hedgerow, contributed its own share of interest to the landscape. To watch the sunset burning through the boughs of the park trees, or the moonlight setting them in bronzed relief against the placid sky; to linger in the meadows till the very bursting of the purple storm-cloud; to lie at the foot of some far-spreading oak, and gaze up through the shifting leaves at the blue sky above; or, on a summer's morning, to watch the waving wheat and rippling barley—these were among my keenest enjoyments. The good which they worked, and the tastes which they assisted to develop, have remained with me ever since. Familiar with every school of beauty,

with scenes consecrated in song and associated with history, I can yet turn to the contemplation of this homely English pastoral with a freshness of admiration that never fades, and a love that knows no change.

CHAPTER V.

BROOMHILL AND ITS OWNERS.

"Mark yon old mansion frowning through the trees."
ROGERS.

ABOUT a mile to the east of Stoneycroft Hall, lay the park, mansion, and domains known collectively as Broomhill. The estate took its name from a picturesque sand-crag which rose to a considerable height at the back of the house, and was all overgrown with furze and wavy ferns. The park, without being extensive, was finely situated; possessed some natural advantages; was broken up into dells and slopes, relieved by occasional gleams of water, and interspersed with oaks and cedars that were said to have been saplings in the reign of Elizabeth. Beyond the park lay a long line of plantations, and a tract of undulating common

that reached away for more than three miles in the direction of Normanbridge. Normanbridge, be it observed, was the nearest market-town.

Antique, irregular, moated, and surmounted by a forest of quaint chimneys, the Hall at Broomhill was altogether a composite piece of architecture. It lay low in a warm hollow, surrounded by foliage and sheltered from all the winds of heaven. Begun about the year 1496, and carried on from century to century with such deviations from the original design as each successive owner was pleased to make, it could not be said to belong to any special order of architecture, but was a mixture of many. The octagonal tower, the bell-turret, and the whole of the east front, dated from the time of the early Tudors. The north wing, with its unsightly pediment and awkward Corinthian pilasters, was erected during the reign of James I., and designed by Inigo Jones. The courtyard, stone gateway, and offices were specimens of the worst Renaissance school; and the lodges were rustic Italian. If there ever was a plan, it had been abandoned and forgotten since the completion of the earliest part of the building. Indeed, it almost seemed as if the masters of Broomhill had striven, each in the fashion of his day, to encumber the old place with just whatever novelty was least in harmony with all that had

gone before. Still it was as interesting a specimen of domestic architecture as one would wish to find; picturesque by reason of its very incongruity; and, in the fullest sense of the word, historic.

Conferred in fief upon some remote ancestor of the time of the Norman kings, this estate had remained in the hands of his descendants for long centuries before a stone of the present edifice was laid. Given to a Farquhar, a Farquhar had held it ever since. There had never been a title in the family, and they prided themselves upon it. Independent Esquires, they had uniformly declined the lesser honours of nobility, and would not exchange the name and style of Farquhar of Broomhill for any rank below the peerage. They were not rich; but their descent was pure, and their honour unblemished. A Farquhar, followed by his fifty lances, fought with distinction in the third crusade under Richard Cœur de Lion, and was present at the siege of Acre. A Farquhar of the sixteenth century held a command under Sir Francis Drake, and was not only one of the few among that gallant crew who returned to tell of a voyage round the world, but even bore a share in the pursuit of the Spanish Armada. The second Charles, in his long exile, had few adherents more faithful than one James Farquhar of Broomhill, who mortgaged his lands and melted his plate for the king's service,

and was afterwards rewarded with a captaincy in his majesty's new regiment of Coldstream Guards. True to the line of the Stuarts, a Farquhar was one of the first to follow the fortunes of the Pretender, and one of the last to abandon them. Later still, two of the house, father and son, fought for Charles Edward on the fatal field of Culloden, and fell, side by side, just as his officers forced the prince away. Having by these means narrowly escaped the forfeiture of their estates, the Farquhar family lived henceforth in strict retirement, mingling but little in political or military questions, and, for the most part, devoting their attention to agricultural pursuits. To improve, to build, to cultivate, to purchase, had now been for more than three quarters of a century the pride and pleasure of the masters of Broomhill. Profiting by the economy of seclusion, they had added more than one farm to the heritage of their Norman predecessors, enlarged their preserves, and extended the bounderies of their park whenever the sale of adjacent lands enabled them to do so. How they had contended with my great grandfather for the purchase of Stoneycroft Hall; and how, being defeated, they had ever since looked with a jealous eye upon those rich six hundred acres which would have added so materially to the value and importance of their own estates, was a story which

my aunt delighted to relate. Somehow or another, she disliked the Farquhar family. Not a deed that they had done, not an honour that they had achieved, found favour in her sight. To all that concerned them she was rootedly antagonistic; and there was not one of the name, from its earliest to its latest representative, of whom she could speak without prejudice. In all parish or county matters, she opposed their views on principle; and at election times it needed but the interest of a Farquhar in one scale to throw all the weight of her influence into the other. Thus, because they were Tories and advocated Church and State principles, my aunt inclined to Liberal views, and was hard upon Parliamentary Bishops; while, for no other reason than the devotion of their ancestors to the cause of the Stuarts, her hero of heroes was, of course, the Prince of Orange.

"The Farquhars, indeed!" she used testily to exclaim. "Don't speak to me of the Farquhars! I'm tired of hearing about their musty ancestors, and their Jacobite nonsense, and their trumpery pride. There hasn't been an ounce of brains in the family these two hundred years, Bab, and that's all about it. The old man was a fool—the last man was a fool—and the present man is a fool, or mad. Mad, I think. Mad as a March hare, Bab; and you may take my word for it!"

I did not take her word for it, however, but, having heard various opinions on the subject, entertained quite other views with respect to the sanity and capacity of the present master of Broomhill.

Hugh Farquhar happened to be abroad, making what was then called the "grand tour," when his father's sudden death left him without any close tie or near relation in the world. The news reached him at Genoa, and, to the amazement of all the parish, failed to bring him home. Instead of posting back to England, he took ship for the East, and had remained absent ever since. The house was shut up; the park gates were closed; the servants paid off or pensioned, according to their age and services. A housekeeper and one or two maids were left in charge of the mansion. A single gardener kept the walks and pastures from desolation. Year after year thus went by. Grass grew in the spacious avenues, and stonecrop along the coping of the garden walls. Birds built in the clustered chimneys whence no smoke issued. Rust gathered on the hinges of gates which were never opened except to the lawyer or the steward. Still the lord of Broomhill showed no care to revisit the home of his fathers; and, at the time when I first became an inmate of Stoneycroft Hall, his voluntary exile had lasted for nearly five years.

Tales of recklessness and profusion, of wild adventure, and of travels extended far beyond the beaten routes, were told of him throughout the county. That he had been heard of in Grand Cairo, and seen in Jerusalem—that he had boated up the Nile, and cut his name on the summit of the great Pyramid—that he had turned Mahommedan—that he had married a Persian princess with her own weight in gold and jewels for her dower—that he had fraternized with some savage Tartar tribe, and was living, a chieftain among chieftains, somewhere in Thibet—that, like Lord Byron, he had taken arms in the Greek cause; and that, like Lady Hester Stanhope, he had become a dweller in Arabian tents, were among the least improbable of these reports. How eagerly I listened to rumours which possessed for me more than the fascination of romance; how, in my childish way, I associated his name with those of my favourite heroes; how I compared him with Sinbad and Don Quixote, Tom Jones, Prince Camaralzaman and Robinson Crusoe, needs scarcely to be told here. Enough that Farquhar of Broomhill became my ideal of a *preux chevalier*, and that none of my aunt's sarcasms weighed with me for a moment. Indeed, I believe that the more he was maligned, the more I admired him; which added to the romance and made it nicer than ever.

Nothing at this time gave me more delight than to scrawl imaginary portraits of him in the fly-leaves of my story books; or, more ambitious still, to cover whole sheets of foolscap with cartoons which represented him in the most bewitching fancy dresses, and the most stupendous situations, struggling with tigers, overcoming crocodiles, rescuing distressed princesses, putting whole tribes of Indians to flight, and otherwise conducting himself in a gallant and satisfactory manner.

Of all this, however, I was careful to let my aunt suspect nothing. She would surely have laughed at me, and I was keenly sensitive to ridicule. So I cherished my romance in secret; feeding my eager fancy with invention, and, from day to day, weaving fresh incidents upon the glowing tapestry of my dreams.

CHAPTER VI.

DOCTOR TOPHAM AND PAUL VERONESE.

"MORNING, Mrs. Sandyshaft," said Doctor Topham, drawing rein at our garden-gate and nodding to my aunt, who was pacing up and down the middle path with her hands behind her back, and the green bonnet inverted over her eyes like a flower-pot. "Famous weather for the crops—bad for the markets. Glass going up—prices going down. Always two sides to a question. Nobody ever satisfied—farmers especially. Eh, Mrs. S.?"

Now Doctor Topham was my aunt's near friend and neighbour. He never agreed with her upon any subject whatever, and they seldom met but they quarrelled; wherefore, apparently, they only liked each other the better. Incompatibility of taste and temper formed, indeed, the bond of their regard,

and aggravation was the salt of their intercourse. Doctor Topham was sallow and saturnine, had long legs and a short poney, and rode with an umbrella.

"Humph! You'd better let farmers and farming alone," replied my aunt, testily. "Talk of something you understand, if only for variety."

"Can't make you my topic, then, Mrs. S.," retorted the doctor.

"I take it," said my aunt, "as no honour to be beyond *your* comprehension."

Whereupon the doctor scratched his ear, and, having no repartee at hand, changed the subject.

"Have you heard that story about Hugh Farquhar and the Paul Veronese?" asked he.

"Yes. Is it true?"

"I fear so."

"Hah—and a genuine picture?"

"So they say; but old masters are dangerous folks to meddle with. No article going in the choice of which a man may be so cheated as a picture—or a wife."

"And worth six thousand pounds, too!" ejaculated my aunt, unmindful of this satire on her sex.

"Value is one thing and price another, Mrs. S.," said the doctor, drily. "Six thousand were paid for it. Randall told me so."

"Extravagant fool! Picked it up somewhere in Venice, did he not?"

"I believe so."

"Six thousand pounds for a picture! Tut, tut! We shall have Broomhill come to the hammer some day, at this rate! The man's mad. I always said he was mad. Six thousand pounds for a picture! Why, bless my soul, doctor, he could have bought the Bosmere property for that price!"

"And not have done so well, perhaps, after all," said Doctor Topham, differing for the mere sake of contradiction. "Travellers see strange things, and sometimes do wise ones by mistake. It's just possible that Farquhar may have given six thousand for an article worth twelve."

"Doctor," said my aunt, emphatically, "you're a greater idiot than I supposed."

"Much obliged, Mrs. S. Happy to return the compliment."

"And ought, at your time of life, to know better."

"My dear Madam, I'm a boy—seven years younger than yourself."

My aunt laughed a short dry laugh like a double knock.

"You'd give your head," said she, "to have the

last word. Well—to return to the Paul Veronese. Will he send it to Broomhill, think you?"

"Send it! Why, it arrived yesterday! I met the procession myself, waggon, packing-case, Randall and all. That's how I come to know so much about it."

"And the subject?"

"Deal boards, Mrs. S.," said the doctor, with a grin, "are not generally transparent; and my eyes, however piercing, are not gimlets. Still, as far as size goes, I can relieve your mind. Our friend seems to have got plenty for his money."

"So! a large picture?"

"A quarter of an acre of it, I should say—high art, at so much per cubic foot."

My aunt shrugged her shoulders. The doctor looked at his watch.

"Mrs. Sandyshaft," said he, "I have a consultation at eleven, and you have made me lose ten minutes. By the way, you know the sad fate of poor Saunders?"

"Saunders? No—what of him?"

"It's all over with him."

"Over with him—mercy alive! is the man dead?"

"Worse, Mrs. S. MARRIED!"

And with this Dr. Topham drew up his knees, put spurs to the poney, and trotted away at a

round pace, with his umbrella over his head, and his feet dangling about eight inches from the ground. My aunt looked after him, indulged in another double knock laugh, and presently resumed her walk. I could contain my curiosity no longer.

"Aunt," said I, eagerly—"aunt, what is a Paul Veronese?"

Pacing to and fro, with her hands behind her back and her eyes fixed on the ground, Mrs. Sandyshaft neither heard nor replied. I plucked her by the sleeve, and repeated the question.

"Aunt, if you please—what is a Paul Veronese?"

"Bab, don't bother. I'm counting."

Used to these rebuffs, I drew back and waited quietly. Presently she looked up, met my asking eyes, and halted abruptly.

"Well, child," said she, "what is it?"

I repeated my inquiry for the third time. My aunt frowned and shook her head.

"I'll tell you what it is, Bab," said she, testily, "you ask too many questions. My life's a perpetual catechism; and for every breath you draw, one might write a note of interrogation. I won't stand it any longer. There's an Encyclopedia in the house—twenty-two volumes of it—and henceforth, when you want to know anything, read it for

yourself. Paul Veronese, indeed! Look for him under V, and there you'll find him."

Delighted to be made free of the locked-up book-case, I ran off, key in hand, and spent the rest of that morning poring over dusty quartos. I looked under V without success; but at length, after some trouble, found, under the head of Cagliari, all that I desired to know. Found that while this great artist was yet a youth, his competitors had themselves decreed him a prize for which they were all contending—that in his maturity he created a school of art, and was the associate of ambassadors and kings—that whole churches and palaces had been enriched by his brush—that in life he achieved honours, and in death immortality. Brief and meagre as it was, this biography made a profound impression upon me. It came to me like a revelation, and dazzled me with vague dreams of art-life and the splendour of the mediæval painters. Allusions and references in the one article led me to the discovery of others, and the lives of Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Rubens, and Vandyck were in turn eagerly devoured. Never having seen a really fine painting, my notions were perforce childish and confused, and the vocabulary of criticism puzzled me like Greek. I could not conceive the meaning of such words as "tone," "breadth," "chiaroscuro," and

the like; and my aunt was unable to help me.

"Don't ask me, Bab," she used to say. "I know more of pigs than pictures; and as for that art-jargon, I believe it's humbug—every word of it!"

For all this, however, I read, believed, and dreamed on. To be a painter became the single ambition of my soul; and a restless desire to behold Mr. Farquhar's Paul Veronese pursued me night and day.

CHAPTER VII.

MY GREAT ADVENTURE.

"Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?"—MARLOWE.

BOLT upright, my aunt sat at her desk, writing; whilst I, waiting for the note, played with the dogs, and looked out of the window.

"You'll see Dr. Topham, if he is at home, Bab," said my aunt, without looking up.

"Yes, aunt."

"And bring back an answer."

"Yes, aunt."

"And take the path over the fields. It's much the nearest."

"Nearer than the park, aunt?"

"Bless me! yes. Half a mile, at least."

I sighed and was silent, while my aunt signed, sealed, and addressed her letter. Having done

this, she beckoned me to her side, looked straight into my eyes, and said—

"Bab, if I were you I'd build myself a hut in Broomhill park, and live there, like Robinson Crusoe."

I felt myself blush up to the roots of my hair; but made no reply.

"Wherever I send you, you contrive to make your way lie through the park. When you take a walk, it is always through the park. You haunt the park. To my knowledge you've been there every day for the last fortnight or three weeks. What's the meaning of it?"

I looked down; stammered; had not a word to say. It was true that I had hovered about the place of late; but I had no courage for confession. How could I confide to her the wayward fancies of my idle hours? How acknowledge the "restless unsatisfied longing" that drew me daily to look from afar upon the walls which encompassed a Paul Veronese? Whether she guessed something of the truth, or thought me merely odd and unaccountable, I cannot determine; but she took pity, at all events, on my confusion, and forbore to question me further. She looked at her watch, and gave me the letter.

"It's now nearly five o'clock," said she, "and, by the fields, you have a mile to walk. I give

you half an hour to go, half an hour to return, and half an hour for delays. It is quite far enough for you, and quite time enough; and if you are not punctual, I shall conclude that you have disobeyed me, and gone round by the park. Now go."

Thankful to be dismissed, I bounded across the hall and the garden, and was out of sight in a moment.

It was now August, and the sultry sun blazed fiercely, bending westward. There were reapers reaping wearily in the hot fields as I went by, and gleaners, footsore and dusty, resting under trees. Not a breath stirred. Not a cloud sailed. The hardened clods and languid grass looked parched and thirsty, and the very birds sang fitfully, as if pining for a shower. As for me, I delighted in the heat and bared my head to the sun, like a little Salamander; and danced on, rejoicing.

When I arrived at his house, Dr. Topham was out, and not likely to be back before dark. The servant would have had me rest awhile; but I looked up wistfully at the old clock in the hall, found that only twenty-five minutes of my allotted time were gone, and so left the note, and took my way slowly homewards. Only twenty-five minutes out of an hour and a half! To the right lay the fields—to the left, the stile and footpath

leading to Broomhill. Supposing that I took the latter, it would be but half a mile added to my walk; and, after all, it was not the distance to which my aunt objected, but the delay. Granted that I reached home even now before the time, how could she be angry with me? Still hesitating, I lingered where the roads divided, and argued thus with my conscience. To convince ourselves according to our inclinations is not difficult. The debate was soon carried in my own favour; the stile soon crossed; the park soon gained.

And what a park it was! Putting Paul Veronese out of the question, it was the pleasantest spot in all our neighbourhood. I loved nothing better than to lie under the shade of the gnarled oaks, and watch the deer browsing in herds along the grassy vistas round about. This afternoon the place seemed more sylvan than ever. The atmosphere, which all day had been dense with heat, was now traversed by currents of cool air, and fragrant with sweet scents. The hush that precedes the sunset had fallen upon every leaf, wild-flower, and blade of grass. Far away, distinct though dulled by distance, echoed the steady strokes of the woodman's axe; and, nearer, a party of disputatious rooks stalked gravely to and fro, and then rose, cawing, into the air.

Strolling idly on, and pausing every now and

then to listen to the silence, I came to a point where the paths again divided. One led over the slopes where the horned oxen were feeding by scores, and opened out on the high road—the other was a right of way passing straight through the yards, and skirting the private gardens of the mansion. My horror of the cattle decided me in favour of the latter, and I went on. On through the "chequered shade" that fell between the trees—on, past the two great cedars, and under the archway with its sculptured shield and motto overhead—on, past the coach-houses and stable-doors, and under the very windows of the Tudor gallery at the back of the house. Naturally a shy child, I hurried along as fast as my feet would carry me; dreading lest I should meet any of the servants, or see a face looking at me from some upper casement. Once past the iron gate, once clear of the yards and offices, I paused to take breath.

Before me stretched a fresh expanse of trees and slopes, bounded by a line of park-palings. To my right, enclosed by a high wall above which I could just see the tops of the pear-trees, lay the fruit and vegetable-gardens. To my left, half in light and half in shadow, stood the grand old house, with the red sunset burning on its panes, like "patines of bright gold." Brightest and nearest

of all, blazed the great stained glass windows at the end of the Tudor wing; and strangely cool and calm, looked, by comparison, the narrow space of formal lawn in front. It was a little strip railed off from the park by a wire fence, and entered by a small gate that had been left partly open. An air of great quiet pervaded the place. A tiny fountain bubbled from a grassy mound in the midst, and a sun-dial on a time-stained pedestal stood before the window. Not a door banged—not a voice echoed—not a footstep crossed either courtyard or garden. It might have been an enchanted palace, with a spell-bound princess dreaming out her hundred years of sleep somewhere in the silence of those upper rooms, for any sign of life that one could see! Awed by the solitude and the hour, I held my breath, and wondered if the servants ever ventured among those suites and corridors above, and how they felt at night when it grew dusk.

And then I noticed for the first time that the shutters of the great bay window were unfastened, and stood some inches apart. Perhaps that very room held the Paul Veronese!

Struck, as it were, by a conviction, I hesitated; cast a hasty glance all around; and darted through the little open gate! To climb up by the aid of a honeysuckle, perch myself on the broad stone ledge,

and press my face close against the glass, was the work of a moment. I had been out so long in the broad sunlight that for many minutes I could distinguish nothing. Then one object after another became visible through the gloom, and I found, to my disappointment, that I was peering into the library. Books, books, books—everywhere books! Books by hundreds, lining the walls, littering the tables, and piled in great heaps on the floor. The room, apparently, was being cleaned, or regulated. I gazed for a long time very earnestly, turned away presently with a sigh, and exclaiming—"Then it is not there, after all!"—swung myself down upon the lawn.

"What is not there?" said a voice close beside me.

Blinded by the change from dark to light, I could only see a tall figure standing between me and the setting sun.

"What is not there? What are you looking for? Who are you?" asked the stranger, laying his hand upon my shoulder. "Why, what a frightened little trespasser it is!"

Frightened indeed! frightened almost out of my senses. Daring neither to look up nor speak, and feeling as though that touch had power to weigh me to the ground! He pitied my distress; for when he spoke again his voice was grave and sweet, like the deep notes of an organ.

"Fear nothing, my child," he said. "I am not angry with you. Come, speak—tell me why you were looking through that window?"

And still he kept his hand upon my shoulder—somewhat firmly too, as if he thought I should presently dart away and escape him.

"So! still dumb? Nay, you will at least tell me your name?"

I faintly stammered—"Barbara."

"Barbara!" repeated the stranger musingly. "A quaint old name! '*My mother had a maid call'd—Barbara!*' Let me see—who says that? Desdemona?"

"I—I don't know, sir," said I, gaining confidence; but wondering at the question.

He smiled, put his hand under my chin, and turned my face to the light.

"I should think not, indeed!" replied he. "What should a little girl like you know about Shakespeare?"

"I have read of him," said I, stoutly. "He was a poet, and wrote plays."

"*Per Bacco!* A learned Barbara! A Barbara versed in the poets! Come, *petite*, you have a surname, surely—what is it?"

Uncomfortably conscious of something like irony in the stranger's manner, I hesitated and looked down.

"My other name is Churchill," I replied, after a minute.

"Churchill—Barbara Churchill! Good names both! They go 'trippingly on the tongue,' and are pleasant to pronounce. There's something in a name, after all. Churchill is historical, too!"

And my new acquaintance, whose observations seemed like spoken thoughts and were scarcely addressed to me at all, began humming the old tune of:—

"*Marlbrook s'en va't en guerre!*"

"The Duke of Marlborough was an ancestor of Papa's," said I, with great dignity. "We have ever so many lives of him at home."

"By Jove, now, this is wonderful!" exclaimed the stranger, laughing, and looking at me more attentively. "She's positively a genealogical Barbara!"

"Oh, we have the genealogy, too," said I eagerly. "It hangs in Papa's room. I have often looked at it—there's a great tree coming out of a man's body, and the apples all have names on them."

He looked at me again, and put his hand to his forehead.

"'Tis strange," he murmured, "but I—I don't remember any Churchills hereabout. Where does your father live, Barbara? In Ipswich?"

"Oh, dear, no! In London."

"So—so. Not a Suffolk family at all! I thought I could scarcely have forgotten that name. Who are you staying with, little one? The Grants of Bosmere?"

"I am staying with my great-aunt," said I, "at Stoneycroft Hall."

Having an immense idea of her social position, I announced this fact with quite a grand air, and expected to see it produce a wonderful effect. But the stranger only burst into a hearty laugh, and repeated my aunt's name over and over again, as if the very sound of it amused him.

"What, Mrs. Sandyshaft!" he cried. "Is *she* your great-aunt? Mrs. Sandyshaft of the hall! Mrs. Sandyshaft of the hundred pigs! Does she still keep a hundred pigs, Barbara?"

"Of course she does," replied I, half-affronted.

He laughed again—then became suddenly grave, and walked to and fro between the sun-dial and the gate for some minutes; lost, apparently, in thought.

"You have not yet told me what you were doing at the library-window," he said, stopping abruptly, and taking me again by the shoulder.

I felt the colour rush to my face; but replied with tolerable self-possession that I was only "looking in."

"Yes; but what were you looking in for?"

"N—n—nothing at all," said I reluctantly.

"*Non è vero*, Barbara! You were looking for something. I heard you say 'it is not there, after all!' Come—I must know all about it, or I will take you home to your aunt and tell her you were trespassing!"

I knew he did not mean that; and I felt sure, somehow, that it would be best to confess at once. Besides, I was no longer afraid of him.

"I thought the picture might be there," I said hesitatingly. "I—I so wanted to see it?"

"Picture!" repeated the stranger, hastily. "What picture?"

"Oh, a beautiful, wonderful picture by Paul Veronese!"

"Paul Veronese!"

"Yes—did you never hear of him? He was a painter—a great painter, and he died a long, long time ago, somewhere in Italy," said I, with childish volubility. "I have read all about him in a book at home, and there's a picture of his somewhere in this house—a picture worth thousands of pounds!"

"And this picture you wish to see?"

"I have wished for nothing else, ever since Dr. Topham talked about it!"

"Humph! And pray what had Dr. Topham to say on the subject?"

"Nothing — except that Mr. Farquhar had bought it, and it was here."

"And Mrs. Sandyshaft—what did she say?"

"Oh, she said that Mr. Farquhar was an extravagant fool, and as mad as a March hare!"

The stranger laughed again; but with a dark flush on his cheek, as if the source of his amusement were scarcely a pleasant one.

"Not a very flattering verdict, upon my word!" said he. "Instructive, however, if taken as the measure of public opinion. 'A plague upon opinion! a man may wear it on both sides, like a leather jerkin.' 'Tis well for Hugh Farquhar that his hearing is duller than that of Signor Heimdale, of celestial memory!"

"Heimdale!" I exclaimed. "Who was he?"

"Heimdale, my dear little Barbara," said the stranger, "was a very respectable personage. He acted as watchman and light porter to the Scandinavian Gods; and his ears were so inconveniently acute that he could hear the grass grow in the meadows, and the wool on the backs of the sheep."

It was now my turn to laugh.

"That's a fairy tale!" cried I. "What comes next?"

"More than I can tell you now," replied he, looking at his watch. "*Vediamo*—it is but seven minutes past six, and we shall have good daylight

for more than an hour. Time enough, *petite*, for you to see the picture."

"The—the picture?" I faltered, incredulously.

He nodded, took me by the hand, and led me round to a low gothic door at the foot of an ivy-grown octagonal turret, facing the moat.

A tiny key, produced from his waistcoat pocket, admitted us into a small passage, which, so soon as the door was closed, became profoundly dark. He then took my hand again; warned me of some three or four stone steps, up which we felt our way cautiously; pushed aside a heavy curtain that seemed all at once to bar our farther progress; and led me into a bright eight-sided room, lined with books, fragrant with fresh flowers, and flooded with the glory of the descending sun. One large window with a rich heraldic bordering of stained glass, overlooked a broad sweep of park and open country; an elaborate bronze lamp swung by a triple chain from the middle of the ceiling; some three or four curious busts of Roman emperors and poets, done in coloured marbles, occupied brackets over the chimney-piece and book-shelves. Something scholastic, something elegant and indolent, was expressed in every trifle about the chamber, from that luxurious piece of furniture which comprised reading-desk, reading-lamp, and easy-chair in one, down to the antique chased

ink-stand on the table, and the delicate curiosities in porcelain and terra-cotta which crowded the mantel-piece.

"Oh, what a beautiful room!" I exclaimed, when my first surprise had somewhat abated.

"'Tis my study, Barbara," replied my new friend.

A strange suspicion for the first time flashed across my mind.

"*Yours?*" I echoed.

"Yes, I am Hugh Farquhar," said he; and rang the bell.

Hugh Farquhar! My hero, my Sindbad, my Prince Camaralzaman! Hugh Farquhar of whom I had heard so much and dreamt so much; whose rumoured travels I had so often tracked upon old maps, and whose adventures I had illustrated upon foolscap without end! All the stories that had ever been told of him, and all the censure that idle tongues had passed upon him, came back in an instant to my memory—and then I recollected the speech that I had myself repeated, and, covered with confusion, knew not where to look.

"Well, *petite*," said he, after a brief pause, "now that you know who I am, have you nothing to say to me? Or, because I am as mad as a March hare, are you afraid of me?"

Afraid of him! Why I felt as if I had known

him for years already. I did not dare, however, to say so; but, looking up, saw such a world of kindly merriment sparkling in his eyes, that I smiled, and shook my head, and said quite confidently:—

"Not a bit."

"So much the better; for I have a mind, Barbara, that you and I should be good friends. Tippoo, desire the servants to unclose the shutters in the long gallery, and let the gardener be sent for. I am going to have that packing-case opened."

"Yes, Sahib," said a low voice close behind me.

I turned somewhat nervously, and found a slender olive-coloured man in a plain black suit and white neckcloth, with gold rings in his ears, standing at my elbow.

"And bring chisels and hammers, Tippoo; and be as quick as possible, for the daylight is going."

Tippoo bent his head; glided like a shadow to the door; and left the room as noiselessly as he had entered it. He had shown no surprise at my presence—he had not even seemed to see me. His glittering black eyes had rested only on his master's face, and he moved like an automaton, obedient only to his master's will.

"Tippoo is my Hindoo servant," said Mr. Farquhar, explanatorily. "I brought him from Benares. He saved my life once, at the risk of his own, and we have never parted since."

"Saved your life?" I exclaimed eagerly. "How? From a lion, or a tiger?"

"No, from the bite of a snake. But I will tell you all about that some other time, Barbara—let us now see after the Paul Veronese. I have not looked upon it myself since the day I bought it!"

And with this he took me away from the study in the turret, through some dreary rooms filled with sheeted furniture and out upon a spacious staircase hung with gloomy old paintings and broad enough for ten persons marching abreast. At the foot of this staircase we came upon a man with a basket of tools, who pulled off his cap respectfully, and stood aside to let us pass. Then Mr. Farquhar opened one half of an oaken door, and I found myself in a long gallery lighted on one side by a row of windows, and closely hung with pictures on the other. The floor was laid down with matting; a large table covered with a dusty sheet was the only article of furniture in sight; and a huge deal packing-case, propped up at the back by wooden supports, stood in the very centre of the room. Two women-servants who were busy opening the shutters when we came in, looked at me with unconcealed amazement.

"This, Barbara," said Mr. Farquhar, "is the picture-gallery. The pictures are mostly portraits, as you see. I could tell you lots of stories about

these grim old ladies and gentlemen; but those will keep for some other occasion. Now, gardener—now Tippoo, we want this lid off. Here, give me a chisel, and let's see how quick we can be!"

And with this he snatched a tool from the basket, and set to work as actively as either of his servants. I stood by breathlessly and watched the process, counting nail after nail as it fell to the ground, and watching plank after plank as it was removed and laid aside. When the last was withdrawn, and only a covering of green baize intervened between me and the object of my desires, I turned cold and trembled.

"Now stand aside, all of you," said the master of the house, himself somewhat flushed and excited. "*Petite*, come forward to the angle of that window, and you will get the best light on it. So—there it is, safe and uninjured—my Paul Veronese!"

He had plucked the baize away, and now came and stood beside me, contemplating his purchase. He was, at first, so absorbed in the pleasure of looking upon it, that he forgot to observe me. He advanced; he retreated; he shaded his eyes with his hands; he moved from right to left, from left to right, and exclaimed impatiently against the fading daylight.

As for me—how shall I confess it?—my first impression was . . . . disappointment.

I had expected too much. I had expected, I know not what; but something, at all events, surpassing all the glow and glory of nature herself. The Paul Veronese of my dreams was an immortal vision—a resplendent mystery—a pageant of heroic forms more than half divine, and adorned in colours transcending the gold and purple of the eastern sky. The Paul Veronese of my awaking was, on the contrary, darkened and deepened by time; majestic, but sombre; and flawed all over with those minute cracks, which are like wrinkles on the brow of ancient art. An aged man, robed and crowned, stood nearly in the centre of the picture surrounded by senators and nobles in dresses of ceremony, four of whom held a canopy above his head. At his feet knelt ambassadors with gifts, and in the distance lay the towers and cupolas of a great city, and a sea thronged with galleys. It was grand, but cold. It appealed neither to my imagination nor my sympathies, and even in point of colour fell woefully short of my ideal.

Struck by my silence, Mr. Farquhar turned at length, and looked at me.

"Well, little one," said he. "What of the picture?"

I knew not how to reply.

"Does it equal your expectations?"

It needed some courage to confess the truth; but I contrived to stammer out a reluctant negative. He looked surprised, annoyed, disappointed. He frowned; glanced from me to the picture, and from the picture back to me; sighed impatiently, and said aloud:—

"Of course not—I was a fool to expect it! What should the poor child know about the matter? There, Tippoo, hang the baize over it again. The show's a failure."

Fain would I have begged to look longer; to have the subject explained to me; to learn why it was so good, and why I could not appreciate it—but I dared not. He was vexed with me—had over-estimated me—was disappointed in me. A choking sense of humiliation rose in my throat. I could not have uttered a syllable to save my life.

Fortunately for me, my vexation passed unnoticed. The covering of the picture and the reclosing of the shutters occupied all Mr. Farquhar's attention—then he made the servants go out before him, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

"Come along, Barbara," said he, "let us go back to the study."

And so we went back by the way we had come. The place had been transformed in our absence.

The fading daylight had been curtained out by a heavy crimson drapery—the table was laid for dinner—the lamp overhead cast a subdued light all around—and, despite the season and the heat, a pile of logs and pine-cones crackled on the hearth. My companion flung himself into his easy chair; bent shiveringly before the fire; and seemed lost in thought. I sat on a stool at the other side of the hearth, and looked at him.

Many and many a year has gone by since that evening, and I have long learned to distrust my pre-conceived ideas of men and things; but it puzzled me then to find myself so far mistaken. How unlike the Hugh Farquhar of my dreams! How unlike that brilliant hero with the Byronic collar whom I had been picturing to myself these four or five months past! I imagined him so handsome, so gallant, so fascinating—"a man rare as phœnix." I found him none of these; and yet, strange though it may seem, I was not disappointed. I had already a true instinct for character; and I am pleased to remember that, even then, I preferred originality and power to mere physical advantages. But I must describe him; and the task is one of no common difficulty. To go back to the first impression of a long-familiar face—to obliterate from cheek and brow the subtle finger-marks of time—to recall tones and gestures which

seemed then to indicate so much, but which custom hath made no longer noticeable .... all these, and more, concur to baffle me.

I have never been a good judge of age; but at the time of which I write, my notions respecting it were of the vaguest possible description. So bronzed, so tall, so serious as he looked, sitting thus by the red fire-light, I believed Hugh Farquhar already to have arrived at middle-life—I now know that he was just twenty-seven years of age. It is possible, however, that he looked older —that varieties of climate, customs and food; adventures by land and sea; fatigue; exposure to weather; and all other contingencies of a wild and wandering life, had wrought some such effect upon him. Be this as it may, the year that followed worked, at all events, but little perceptible difference.

I have said that he was not handsome—nay, were I closely to analyse his features, I should perhaps be forced to confess that he was plain; and yet I never knew anyone who thought him so. There was a certain grandeur in the poise of his head, a rugged power stamped upon his brow, a careless strength and dignity in his every gesture, that marked him for no ordinary man. Were I bidden to single out any well-known head, not as a likeness but a type, I should name Beethoven's.

Yet it would then be necessary to efface those furrows of scorn and suffering, rage and bitterness, which plough the features of the deaf musician. The same loose, thick locks, however, were there —the same characteristic prominences over the eyes —the same broad brow and massive jaw. Swarthy of complexion, dark-haired, dark-eyed, tanned by the wind and sun, and wearing such an amount of waving beard and moustache as was seldom seen in those days on this side of the Channel, Hugh Farquhar looked masculine and individual enough; but could scarcely have been more thoroughly the reverse of all that I had previously imagined. Men, as a rule, admired him more generally than women. Women, rarely indifferent, beheld in his countenance something more attractive than beauty. What was that something? How shall I define, how analyse it? Was it the impress of emotional, or the light of intellectual power? Or was it not, rather, that every glance and every tone conveyed some subtle record of an adventurous and reckless life, passion-worn, unsatisfied, and self-consuming?

I had intended to give my first childish impression of Hugh Farquhar, and I find that I have described him from my later experience. It is prematurely done; but let it be. Imperfect as it is, I can make it no better.

The fire blazed and crackled merrily all this time. My companion sat and looked at it with thoughts far distant. I crouched down in the shade, and watched him till I knew his face by heart. A quarter of an hour, or twenty minutes, went by thus, in silence. Then the door fell noiselessly back, and Tippoo came in with a small tray of silver-covered dishes. Mr. Farquhar sighed, and looked up for the first time.

"What," said he wearily, "is it already half-past seven?"

"It wants twenty-five minutes to eight, Sahib," replied the Hindoo, waiting his master's signal to remove the covers.

Mr. Farquhar rolled his easy chair round to the table, and glanced with a sort of abstracted wonder at the seat which had been placed for me.

"Do we expect anyone, Tippoo?" said he.

Tippoo lifted his black eyes to his master's face, and then glanced meaningly towards the corner in which I was sitting. Mr. Farquhar turned half-round, started, laughed with something like confusion in his face, and said:—

"Come, little one, the dinner is ready, and I should hope we are both hungry by this time!"

I came over without a word, and sat down where he bade me; but I was not hungry now. He had forgotten all about me!

How kind he was all dinner-time, and how he strove to compensate for his forgetfulness! He shook off his thoughtful mood, and I could see that it cost him an effort. He chatted with me; he exerted himself to make me laugh; he helped me to the choicest morsels, and insisted that I should taste every one of the dishes. They were all strange to me, and had a hot, spiced flavour which I did not like. Besides this, they were called the oddest names imaginable—mulligatawny, pilaff, caviare, curry, macaroni, and so forth—enjoying thereby the double advantage of being unpalateable and unpronounceable. By and by, the meats were removed, and strong black coffee, dried fruits, liqueurs and sweetmeats were brought to table. Mr. Farquhar then heaped my plate with dates, bonbons, and raisins; turned his chair once more to the fire; bade me do the same; and lighted a long Turkish pipe which had a coily tube like a green and golden snake, and a bowl of bell-shaped glass that rested on the ground.

"I am afraid, *petite*," said he, when Tippoo had left the room and we were once more left alone, "that you will not have much to say in praise of my cookery when you get home?"

Home! The word struck me like a blow. Like Hazlitt's "rustic at a fair," I had been all this time "full of amazement and rapture, and

had no thought of going home, or that it would soon be night." Now it all rushed upon me in a moment.

"Oh, what o'clock is it, please?" I faltered.

"Nearly nine by my watch, *petite*."

I had risen; but, hearing this, laid aside the untasted fruits, and sat down again in blank dismay. Nine o'clock, and I was to have been home, at the latest, by half-past six! What was to become of me? What would my aunt say to me? How should I dare to face her? What excuse could I offer for my disobedience?

Something of this I contrived brokenly to express, and Mr. Farquhar seeing my distress, rang the bell at once, and tried to reassure me.

"Fear nothing, little friend," said he kindly. "I will take you home myself, presently, and bear all the blame as well. Tippoo, let Satan be saddled and brought round directly."

Tippoo bent his head, and disappeared. Mr. Farquhar glanced again at his watch, and smoked on with the utmost composure.

"In fifteen minutes," said he, "I promise to land you in your aunt's sitting-room. That allows me five minutes more to enjoy my pipe and coffee, and ten to ride from here to Stoneycroft Hall. Come, banish that melancholy look and trust to me for Mrs. Sandyshaft's forgiveness?"

I would gladly have so trusted, if I could; but I too well knew what were my aunt's prejudices, and what her opinion of Hugh Farquhar and his family. However, I made an effort to be cheerful, and the five minutes went slowly by. As the last expired, my companion laid his pipe aside, and passed in an instant from the purest oriental languor to a state of genuine European activity.

To ring again for Tippoo, who immediately made his appearance laden with wraps—to envelope me in a cape lined with furs, and himself in a huge bearskin coat, fitter for the Arctic regions than for an autumn night in England—to pour out a glass of some delicious liqueur, and compel me to drink it—to be booted, spurred and equipped, all in the twinkling of an eye—to take me up in his arms, and, preceded by Tippoo, carry me downstairs and across the courtyard, as if I had been a feather .... all this was the work of only a few seconds, and was done in less time than it takes to tell.

A groom holding a superb black horse, waited for us at the outer door.

"Soho, Satan—soho, boy!" said Farquhar, pausing an instant to lay his hand upon the glossy neck and mane, and then springing lightly into the saddle. The horse whinnied, and scraped the gravel impatiently with his fore-foot—Tippoo

lifted me up, and placed me before his master on the saddle—Mr. Farquhar encircled me with his right arm, bade me hold tightly, gave a low whistle, and away we went at a gallop, dashing under the great archway, and making right across the park!

The rapid motion at first took away my breath, and I felt as if I must fall off and be dashed to pieces. This, however, soon passed away, and, feeling the clasp of his strong arm, I presently gained confidence, and enjoyed the speed with which we went. It was a glorious night. The moon shone with that yellow light which only belongs to her in the golden harvest-time; the dew sparkled, diamond-like, upon the grass; there were nightingales singing in the tall elms; and the deer, clustered in sleeping herds about the great oaks here and there, started at our approach and fled away by scores in the moonlight.

"Ha, little one!" said my companion, "see how they run! They believe we are hunting them to-night. Doesn't this remind you of Johnny Gilpin? It reminds me of one mistress Lenora who once rode a hundred miles somewhere in Germany at an unbecoming hour of the night, and lived to repent of it.

"*Graut Liebchen auch? . . Der Mond scheint hell!*
Hurrah! die Todten reiten schnell!
Graut Liebchen auch vor Todten?"

By Jove! I shall begin to fancy presently that I am Wilhelm, and you Lenora. So—here the park ends, and there's a five-foot paling 'twixt us and the road. Hold on, little one, and hey for a leap! Soho, Satan—soho!"

Horribly alarmed, I clung to him as a drowning man clings to a plank; but Satan took the fence like a greyhound, and we were over before I knew where I was.

"Why do you call him Satan?" I asked, as soon as I had recovered my breath.

"Because he is black and wicked," replied Mr. Farquhar laughingly. "He is amiable to no one but me. He bites all the grooms, kills all the little dogs, and hates the sight of a woman. He tolerates Tippoo (but that's a prejudice of colour), and he loves me .... don't you, Satan, boy? He eats from my hand, kneels when I mount him, and follows me like a dog. I bought him from an Arab. He was a colt then, desert-born and bred. He will never tread the Arabian sands again—nor I either, perhaps. Bah! who knows? I may turn Bedouin, and make the pilgrimage to Mecca 'in most profound earnest,' as Claudio says, before I die!"

And with this he hummed more German lines, and urged his horse on faster and faster. The trees and hedges flew past—Satan seemed as if he

would tear the road up with his hoofs—the sparks flashed from a flint every now and then; and our shadows sped beside us, like ghosts in the moonlight. Now we came upon a group of cottages, only hidden from Stoneycroft Hall by a bend in the road—now upon the pound, and the pond, and the old house, where lights were moving to and fro in the windows. We found the gate open—(I was glad of it, for we should certainly have taken the leap, had it been closed)—and dashed up to the door at full gallop. A touch of the rein, a word, and Satan, foaming and quivering as he was, stood stone-still, like a horse carved in black marble.

Mr. Farquhar dismounted with me in his arms, and raised his whip to knock upon the door; but it opened before the blow fell, and my aunt, candle in hand, narrowly escaped the whip-handle. She looked pale and stern; opened her lips as if to question; then, seeing my frightened face peep out from the furs, uttered a sharp cry, and dropped the candle.

"Found! found! Jane, come here! Oh! Bab—naughty, naughty Bab, what an evening this has been!"

And with this, half-crying, half-laughing, she snatched me up, kissed, cuffed, and shook me all together, and knew not whether to be glad or

angry. Then Jane came running up with lights, and there was more kissing and scolding; and then we all stood still, and paused for breath. My aunt turned from me to Mr. Farquhar.

"And it is to this gentleman that I am indebted for the return of my truant?" said she, fixing her keen eyes inquiringly upon him. "How can I ever thank him enough?"

"Simply by not thanking me at all," said he, standing by the porch with the bridle over his arm, and speaking for the first time. "Indeed, before we talk of obligations, I should beg your pardon; for, upon my soul, madam, I was near making your acquaintance by knocking you down!"

"Sir," replied my aunt with a stately reverence, for she could be immensely formal upon occasion, "I rejoice to make yours upon any terms."

"Then let me name them. Forgive this little girl for the alarm she has caused you. The fault was mine. I met her near my house, fell into chat with her, and thoughtlessly took her indoors to see a picture. How the time slipped by, I scarcely know; but we were amused with one another, and I believe that neither of us thought of the consequences till after dinner. It is now just twenty minutes since the word 'home' was first uttered, and I flatter myself that no time has been lost on

the way. I promised to plead for her—nay, more, I promised her your pardon."

My aunt looked grave, or tried to do so. I believe she was almost glad to be obliged to forgive me.

"I redeem your promise, sir," said she, "in acknowledgment of the trouble you have taken in bringing her home; though, but for your intercession" (shaking her head at me), "I must, have punished her. I exact obedience, and I will have it. Bab—thank the gentleman for his kindness. Sir, please to walk in."

"Not to-night, I thank you," said he courteously. "It is already late, and my little friend looks weary. If, however, I may call at some more reasonable hour . . . ."

"You will be welcome," interrupted my aunt with one of her abrupt nods. "You will be very welcome. May I ask your name before you go? Your face is strange to me, and yet I seem to have some knowledge of it."

Mr. Farquhar smiled; drew a card from his pocket-book; gave it to me with a kiss; bade me hand it to my aunt; sprang into the saddle; took his hat quite off, and bowed profoundly; cried out "good night, *petite*," and dashed away at full speed down the garden.

"Humph!" said my aunt, shading her eyes

from the candle and watching him to the turn of the road, "a fine horse, and a reckless rider. Let's see who he is. Mercy alive! FARQUHAR OF BROOMHILL!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD.

"Thou knowest I hunger after wisdom, as the Red Sea after ghosts: therefore I travel."

DEATH'S JEST-BOOK.

SOME days went by, and Hugh Farquhar's promised visit remained unpaid. I rose every morning with the hope that he would come before night, and I went to bed every night disconsolate. I waited for him—I wearied for him—I was as much in love with him as any little girl of ten years old could be! I brooded over every word that he had uttered; strove to draw his portrait, and tore up each abortive outline as soon as it was made; recalled the last tones of his voice, the last echo of his horse's hoofs, and the parting kiss that he had given me in the porch. He was still my hero, and a more heroic hero than ever—Prince

Camaralzaman, with a dash of Robin Hood now, and a spice of the Wild Huntsman! I believe, on looking back to this childish passion, that it was most of all the power of the man that attracted me. He was altogether older and plainer than I had pictured him; and yet that sense of power pleased me better than youth or beauty. It was power of every kind—of health, and courage, and daring—of the mind and the will—of freedom and fortune. His wealth I believed boundless; and Broomhill, with its portrait-gallery, its corridors, and stately *suites*, reminded me of Aladdin's palace. His mode of life, too, had something strange and solitary in it. There was a mystery and a charm in the gloom that sometimes fell upon him. There was an oriental romance in the very food he ate, in the pipe he smoked, in Tippoo the noiseless, and in Satan the swift! I could do nothing, in short, but talk and dream of Farquhar of Broomhill.

My aunt said very little about him, and listened with assumed indifference to all I had to tell. That she was interested, however, and that she not only listened but remembered, I knew to a certainty; for I heard her repeating it next morning, word for word, as she and Dr. Topham paced up and down the garden-walk together. From this moment the train was fired, and the news spread.

Carried from parish to parish, and from house to house, it was known, as if by telegraph, throughout the county. Alas for Hugh Farquhar!—his incognito was soon over.

At length there came a day when my aunt and I were sitting together after dinner, beside the open window. There had been rain, and the atmosphere was damp and close, like that of a hot-house. Not a breath stirred; not a bird sang; not a leaf rustled. A voluptuous languor pervaded all the drowsy air—a subtle perfume uprose from the reeking earth—a faint mist obscured the landscape. Yielding to the influences of the hour, my aunt had fallen asleep with the newspaper in her hand, whilst I, perched on the broad window-seat with my silks and sampler, suffered the work to lie unheeded in my lap, rested my chin upon my two palms in an odd, old-fashioned way, and counted the drops as they fell one by one from the broad leaves of the heavy-headed sun-flower outside in the garden. A long time went by thus, and was meted out by the ticking of the old watch over the fire-place—a long, long time, during which only one solitary pedestrian trudged past, with an umbrella over his shoulder. All at once, remote but growing rapidly nearer, I heard the quick echo of a well-remembered gallop! Louder, closer, faster it came. I felt the blood rush to my face—I held

my breath—I strained my eyes to that one spot where there was an opening in the trees.... then, springing suddenly to my feet, I grasped Mrs. Sandyshaft by the arm, and cried—

"Oh, wake up, aunt! wake up! Here he comes at last! I knew he *must* come some day!"

"He? What? Who?" exclaimed Mrs. Sandyshaft, bewildered and half-asleep. "What noise is that?"

"That's Satan, aunt! Hark, how fast he's coming!"

My aunt became rigid.

"Satan!" she repeated. "Mercy on us! The child's demented."

I could only point triumphantly to the gate where Mr. Farquhar had that moment dismounted, and was now tying up his horse. My aunt relaxed, and smiled grimly.

"Oh, call him Satan, do you?" said she. "Not a bad name, Bab—might suit the master as well as the beast, eh?"

Whereupon I rushed away without replying, and, encountering him in the porch, became suddenly shy, and had not a word to say. Seeing me, he smiled and held out both his hands.

"*Eccolà!*" said he. "The very Barbara of my thoughts! How does your grace to-day? Well, I trust, and undisturbed by the late fluctuations in

the funds; or the changes in the ministry? What news of the pigs and the fine arts?"

Blushing and puzzled, I lingered with my hand in his, and knew not what to answer.

"How! not a word? not a greeting? not a mere '*give you good den, Sir Richard?*' Oh, faithless Barbara!—and to think that I have brought a box of Turkish sweetmeats for you, in my pocket! Come, are you not glad to see me now?"

And he took out a pretty little box of inlaid woods, and held it playfully before my eyes. I snatched away my hand and drew back.

"I am not glad for the sake of what you give me," said I, grievously hurt; and so ran on to the parlour door, and left him to follow. My aunt held up her finger at me—she had heard every word—and advanced to meet him.

"Sir," she began, "I am glad to see you; and you are the first of your name to whom I ever said so. Sit down."

Mr. Farquhar smiled, bowed, and took the proffered seat,

"I hope, sir," continued my aunt, "that you have come to settle amongst us. You have been too long away. Travelling is a fool's Paradise; and you must have sown your wild oats by this time."

Mr. Farquhar looked infinitely amused.

"Madam," said he, "it is a branch of agriculture to which I have been assiduously devoting myself for the last five years."

"Humph! And now you have come back for good?"

"I should be sorry to believe that I have come back for evil."

My aunt fixed her eyes sharply upon him, and shook her head.

"That's not what I mean, Mr. Farquhar," said she. "I want to know if you are going to live on your own lands, lead the life of an English gentleman, and marry a wife?"

"I had rather marry a maid," retorted he, with the same provoking smile, "and sooner than either, Mrs. Sandyshaft, I would remain a bachelor. As to living on my own lands, I may aver that I have done so ever since I left England; for, as my steward can testify, I have drawn my rents with the most conscientious regularity."

"And spent them too, I'll warrant!" said my aunt, grimly.

Whereupon Mr. Farquhar laughed, and made no reply.

"England is the best place after all," observed she, returning to the charge. "The *only* place!"

"For fogs and fox-hunts, granted."

"For liberty of the press, public spirit, domestic

comfort, and national respectability! Find me the French for 'common sense,' Mr. Farquhar!"

"Find me the French for the verb 'to grumble!'"

"I should be sorry if I could," said my aunt, rubbing her hands, and enjoying the argument with her whole heart. "'Tis a national characteristic—a national amusement—a national institution!"

"And the exclusive privilege of the British Lion," added Mr. Farquhar, with a shrug of the shoulders. "*Allons*! I am a citizen of the world—a vagrant by nature—a cosmopolitan at heart. I confess to little of the patriotic spirit, and much of the Bohemian. London porter tastes no better in my mouth than 'Hungary wine,' and between *Kabobs* and mutton-chops I find but little difference!"

My aunt held up her hands in amazement.

"Young man," said she, "your opinions are detestable. You don't deserve to have eight centuries of ancestors. No patriotic spirit, indeed! Mercy alive! What's your opinion, pray, of the English history?"

"My dear madam, I think it an admirable work—for the library-shelves."

"Have you ever read it?"

"Yes, in my boyish days, when I believed in Messrs. Hume and Smollett, looked on Charles the

First as a genuine Royal Martyr, and pinned my faith upon the virgin purity of Queen Elizabeth!"

My aunt smiled in spite of herself.

"I fear," said she, "that you are a sad scapegrace, and believe in very little."

"*Que voulez-vous?* The world has rubbed off most of my illusions."

"So much the worse for you. The happiest man is the most credulous."

"There is the ass the most enviable of quadrupeds! I cry you mercy, madam! Let those be dupes who will—'I'll none of it.' Is it not better to see things as they are, and take them at their value?—to distinguish between base metal and gold, paste and brilliants? Now, for my part, I had rather know at the first glance that my mistress's front-teeth were false, than live to be told of it by some officious friend who met her at the dentist's!"

"Sir," said my aunt, emphatically, "I see nothing for you but a strict course of matrimony."

"Then your opinion of my case is, indeed, serious!"

"You must settle in England," continued my aunt. "You must see society. You must marry. A good-tempered, kind-hearted, well-educated English girl is what you want; and I know of

four or five in this very county, all of whom would suit you to a T."

"Then I will marry them all!"

"No, you won't, indeed! You are in a civilized country here, sir, and not among Turks and savages. Marry them all, hey? I like the idea!"

"*I* should prefer the reality!"

My aunt shook her head impatiently.

"Nonsense!" said she. "I am in earnest, and advise you as a friend. You want a wife, and, I repeat it, you must marry."

"Spoken *ex cathedrâ*," observed Mr. Farquhar, parenthetically.

"There's—let me see—there's Sir John Crompton's daughter," continued my aunt, telling off the young ladies on her fingers; "and there's Miss Heathcote, with thirty thousand pounds; and there are the two Somervilles, daughters of the Dean of Wrentham, and . . ."

"My dear lady," interrupted Mr. Farquhar, "before you go on with your list, tell me what chance I have of becoming acquainted with these Sirens? Shall I advertise myself in the 'Ipswich Herald,' or hang a label round my neck with the words 'TO LET' printed thereon in golden characters?"

"Neither, sir. You shall send for paper-

hangers, upholsterers, and confectioners; put your house in order; and issue invitations to a ball."

"Not for a kingdom. What! pull the old place about my ears, and submit to an invasion of flirts and fiddlers? No, madam—I have too much respect for the spiders!"

"In that case," said my aunt, "I will give a party myself."

"I'll never believe it, Mrs. S.!" cried a voice at the door. "It's a fiction, a fable—

> . . . . 'a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing!'"

"Topham," observed my aunt, "you are a fool. Come in, will you, and be introduced to Mr. Farquhar of Broomhill."

Dr. Topham came in, hat, umbrella, and all, and solemnly deposited those properties on the table.

"You have mentioned that circumstance so often, Mrs. S.," said he, "that I begin to fancy I must be a fool, after all. I shall charge my cap and bells to your account. Don't trouble yourself, ma'am, to make me known to Mr. Farquhar. I can do that for myself. Sir, shake hands. You and I are old friends, and our acquaintance dates back for more than a quarter of a century. Introductions, forsooth! Why, sir, it was *I* who first had the pleasure of introducing *you* to your own

father! I dare say you don't remember that event so accurately as I do?"

A shade, a trouble, an indescribable something flitted over Hugh Farquhar's sunburnt face, at these words.

"Indeed!" said he, in a low voice. "Then you knew my mother?"

"I did—a most excellent and beautiful lady, charitable, sincere, and earnest. She was beloved by rich and poor, and for many a year her name remained a household word throughout this country-side."

Mr. Farquhar bent his head gravely.

"You do her justice, sir," he said; and turned away with a sigh.

There was a silence of some moments, during which Dr. Topham and my aunt exchanged belligerent glances, and looked as if longing to begin their accustomed squabble. Presently Hugh Farquhar spoke again.

"It surprises me, Dr. Topham," said he, "that I have no recollection of your face. Your name I seem to have heard before; and yet, when I was a lad and used to come home from Eton and Oxford for the vacations, it was Mr. Stanley who. . . ."

Precisely so. Mr. Stanley of Normanbridge," interrupted the doctor. "Your father and I could

never agree, Mr. Farquhar. We had a grand fracas, in fact; and though your mother did her best to reconcile us, the breach was never healed. Mr. Stanley is a very clever man—too fond of the lancet, though! Too fond of the lancet!"

"Hold your tongue, doctor," said my aunt, acidly. "You're all a set of murderers. Some prefer steel, and some poison—that's the only difference."

"Much obliged, Mrs. S. I reserve my vengeance till you next have occasion for my services."

Hugh Farquhar laughed, and rose to take his leave.

"War being declared," said he, "I will leave you to fight it out fairly. Dr. Topham, will you come up and smoke a pipe of Turkish tobacco with me to-morrow evening? At present I am but a hermit, and live in a turret by myself, like a mouse in a trap; but I shall be glad to see and know more of you. Mrs. Sandyshaft, you must let me know when you have chosen a wife for me. If you could allow me to see the lady before we meet at the altar, I should prefer it; but, for mercy's sake, don't marry me unawares!"

"You shall choose for yourself, Mr. Farquhar," replied my aunt. "I mean to give that party, I assure you."

"Not on my account, pray!"

"Yes, on your account, solely—therefore you will be bound to come to it."

And with this they shook hands, and parted. As Mr. Farquhar left the room, he beckoned me to follow, and walked with me silently to the garden gate. There he paused.

"Barbara," he said gently, "why were you so angry just now, when I offered you that box?"

I hung my head, and could find no words to reply.

"If you had known," he continued, in the same tone, "what trouble it gave me to find those *bonbons*, and how many hundreds of miles they have travelled with me, and with what pleasure I put them in my pocket to-day (hoping to please you), I don't think, *petite*, that you would have treated me quite so ungraciously."

I felt myself tremble and change colour.

"I—I—it wasn't that I was ungrateful," I faltered. "But you said, 'Are you glad to see me *now?*'—I was glad before! I heard you when you were a mile away, and knew that it was you! I—I have been at the window looking for you all the week! Oh, pray forgive me—I was not ungrateful!"

Mr. Farquhar looked at me very earnestly, and with something like astonishment in his face.

"Why, *Barbara mia*," said he, "you are the

most tender-hearted little maid that ever I met! Come, let us be friends. By Jove, I believe it was my fault, after all!"

And with this he stooped, and kissed away two large tears which were stealing down my cheeks.

"Will you take the box now, for my sake?" he whispered—then, with a last kiss, placed it in my hands, mounted, and galloped away.

I watched him out of sight, wondering if he would look back. He never so much as glanced to the right or left; but rode straight on, and vanished round the bend of the road.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHILD'S LOVE.

"Love sought is good; but given unsought is better."
SHAKESPEARE.

HUGH FARQUHAR'S first visit was followed, not long after, by a second and a third; so that he soon became a recognised *habitué* of the house. His favourite time was twilight; and he used to ride up to the porch, tie Satan by the bridle, and walk in without announcement. My aunt then laid aside her paper; grumbled at him heartily, if he awoke her from her nap; and prepared for a chat. Sometimes I sat aside in a dark corner, and fell to my old occupation of watching him till it grew too dusk to see his face distinctly; after which I was content only to listen to his voice. Sometimes, for I was a great pet now, and highly privileged, I took a little stool at

his feet, and laid my head against his knee, and was almost too happy. When, perchance, he interrupted his conversation to address a stray word to me; or, in the listlessness of thought, passed his hand through the wavy folds of my long hair, I trembled and held my breath, lest any motion of mine should cause him to take it away the sooner. What I would have given to dare to kiss that hand matters not now. It was a child's idolatry—an idolatry so innocent, unselfish, and spiritual, as few feel more than once, if once, in life.

My aunt and he suited each other, after their own odd antagonistic fashion. They always differed in opinion, for the sake of argument and the pleasure of wrangling; but I believe they often agreed at heart. My aunt had read much; and, despite her crotchets and prejudices, could both speak and think well when she chose. Books, history, politics, foreign life and manners, agriculture, and the arts, formed the staple subjects of their talk; and about each and all, Hugh Farquhar had something amusing and original to say. His conversation was peculiar, fragmentary, discursive, idiocratic. When thoroughly at his ease and "i' the vein," he wandered on from topic to topic, from jest to earnest, and thought aloud, rather than conversed. His memory was prodigious. He

knew Shakespeare and his contemporaries by heart, and was so thoroughly steeped in the spirit of that age that his very phraseology had oftentimes an Elizabethan flavour. Sometimes dreamy, sometimes sad, sometimes sarcastic—varying in his mood with every turn of the argument—breaking into "flashes of merriment" and unexpected sparkles of wit—abounding in quaint scraps of dry and dusty philosophies, and in quotations as apt as they were sometimes whimsical, Hugh Farquhar talked as few can talk, and fewer still can write. To record his conversation is, therefore, singularly difficult—to preserve its aroma, impossible. I should conceive, from what we read of those tea-table talks at the little waterside house in Islington, that Charles Lamb's familiar parlance may have been somewhat similar—more exquisitely playful, perhaps, and more sensitively sympathetic—certainly less caustic. Both, at all events, were, in the rapidity of their hues and changes, kaleidoscopic. I learned much from these twilight gossips; and though I might not always understand, I always enjoyed them. Granted that the topics and opinions mooted on both sides were generally in advance of my actual knowledge, they set me thinking, and perhaps did more towards the premature development of my intellect than could have been effected by any set system of training. At the

same time it must be confessed that my actual education was, in some degree, at a standstill. A couple of hours devoted each morning to Gibbon, Goldsmith, or Buffon, and another hour or so to the Parliamentary debates every afternoon, scarcely deserves the name of education; and, but for other circumstances, would have done little to improve me. I was free, however, of my aunt's book-case, of the fields, the sunlight, and the fresh air. I read more, saw more, felt more than I had ever read, seen, or felt in all my life before. Above all, I was happy; and happiness derived from, and dependent on, the love of those who are better and wiser than we, is, in itself, an education.

Thus the weeks went by, and the autumn waned, and still Hugh Farquhar dwelt alone in his solitary tower, and became, as I have already said, a frequent guest at Stoneycroft Hall. As the days grew shorter and the twilight encroached upon our dinner-hour, he took to coming later, and often rode over between eight and nine to drink coffee and play piquet with my aunt. Scarcely a week passed that he did not send her a present of game, or the latest parcel of books and magazines from London; while to me he never failed to bring some pretty trifle—a tiny Swiss Chalet bought at Berne, a coral toy from Naples, a Chinese puzzle, or a string of Indian wampum. He cer-

tainly spared no pains to place himself upon the footing of an intimate; though why he should have done so, and what pleasure he could find in the society of an eccentric old lady and a shy little girl of ten, seems unaccountable enough. Whether he meant to stay in England, or whether he was here for only a few months, remained as great a mystery as at first. He would either give no answer when questioned, or declare that he knew no more than we—cared, perhaps, even less—had no wish to settle, and preferred to keep "one foot in sea, and one on shore," for, at least, a few years longer.

"But surely," said my aunt, assailing him one evening on this her favourite topic, "surely you have some definite plans?"

"Plans, my dear Mrs. Sandyshaft?" he exclaimed. "Not I, indeed. Heaven forbid!"

"Well, then, some regard for the future?"

"None. *Oggi* is my motto, and *domani* may go to the devil!"

My aunt shook her head gravely, and looked shocked.

"You are wrong," said she; "young, wrong, and headstrong. You don't look at life seriously enough. You don't . . . ."

"Pardon me, I look at it, perhaps, too seriously. If you imagine that I make of it one idle holiday, you mistake me altogether. I do no such thing.

I look upon it as a very sad, wearyful, unsatisfactory affair; and because to-day is so burdensome, I care little for the events of to-morrow. I love to drift from day to day, like a weed from wave to wave; and it seems to me that the philosophies of all time are comprised in that sentence of Sadi the Persian:—

> 'Tis better to sit than to stand;
> 'Tis better to be in bed than sitting;
> 'Tis better to be dead than in bed.'"

"Wherefore," observed my aunt drily, "you choose a life of incessant activity. Nonsense! Drift here, if drifting suits you; and if lying in bed be so very philosophical, lie in bed at Broomhill."

"First provide me with that model wife, Mrs. Sandyshaft!"

"Besides," continued my aunt, "there are duties arising from your position. You have a stake in the country, and...."

"And a very tough one it is!" interrupted he, laughingly. "I prefer a *côtelette à la Soubise*, served at the *Maison Dorée!*"

Whereupon my aunt waxed wroth, cited Dr. Johnson's opinion on the making of puns and the picking of pockets, and abandoned the siege for that evening.

Not many nights after this, he came again. It was the first frost of the season; and, though

he had ridden fast and wore his great fur coat, he complained bitterly of the climate.

"Climate!" repeated my aunt, "Bless the man! what better climate can he desire, I should like to know? Climate, indeed, with such a coat as that on his back!"

"'The owl for all his feathers was a-cold!'" quoted Hugh Farquhar, hanging over the fire like a half-frozen Kamschatkan.

My aunt piled on more coals, rang for coffee, and muttered something about "salamanders" and "fire-worshippers."

"Do you wonder that I freeze," said he, "when for five years I have known no winter? My Decembers and Januarys have all been spent in South Italy, the East, or the tropics. Last Christmas Eve I lay awake all night in the deep grass on a ledge of one of the Chilian Andes, looking up to the Centaur and the Southern Cross, with not even a cloak for my counterpane. The year before that, I ate my roast-beef and plum-pudding with the officers of the Fourth Light Dragoons in Calcutta. 'Tis no laughing matter, let me tell you, to come back to this infernal land of fog and frost, after wandering for five long years

'where Universal Pan,
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance,
Leads on the Eternal Spring!'

Pshaw! Dante was of my mind when he made the lowest circle of hell an icy region, and imbedded His Majesty in the midst of it!"

"If you had been content to live respectably in your own country," said my aunt, testily, "you'd never have felt any difference. Will you take some brandy with your coffee? I hate to hear people's teeth clattering like castanets!"

"'Tis 'a spirit of health,' and I will not refuse to entertain it. *Barbarina mia*, will you vouchsafe to kiss me this evening? So! There's a shy little salute! Your ladyship is chary of your rosy lips, methinks! Ah! did you but know what I have brought to show you, and which of my pockets it is in! A sketch-book, *petite*—a sketch-book full of pictures!"

My hands were diving into his pockets in an instant; for, by this time, those pockets were familiar ground. The first thing I brought out was a little square packet, sealed at both ends—the second, a book with a silver clasp.

"Stop," said he, taking the former from me, and breaking the seals that fastened it, "this is a pack of cards, Mrs. Sandyshaft, which I propose to play our piquet with to-night. Pray observe them, and tell me which are trumps."

Saying which, he dealt out some twenty or thirty visiting cards in rapid succession, laughing

heartily the while to see my aunt's amazement.

"General Kirby—Mr. Fuller—Mrs. Fuller—The Rev. Edward Grote—Sir John and Lady Crompton—Miss Price—Lord Bayham—Captain Carter—Mr., Mrs., and the Misses Capel—the Hon. and Rev. Augustus Petersham .... Why, where, for gracious sake, did you get all these?"

"They have been accumulating for the last month at compound interest; and I gathered them out of a basket in my study this afternoon. A famous pack for playing, with a suitable sprinkling of court cards and, doubtless, the usual allowance of knaves!"

"Have you returned any of these visits?"

"Not one. I thought of sending Tippoo about the country, as my representative."

"Absurd!"

"Not at all. He need only lie back in a corner of the carriage, wear lavender kid gloves, and hand visiting cards through the window. If anyone caught a glimpse of his face, it would only be thought that travelling had spoiled my complexion. You may depend he would do it capitally, and be far more majestic than myself."

But my aunt only shook her head, took out a pencil and the back of an old letter, and began gravely making a list of all the names.

"Have you any idea," she said, presently, "of

the number of folks which these cards represent?"

"Not I!"

"Well—from eighty-five to a hundred."

"Impossible!"

"Do you doubt it? Look here, then. The Cromptons have five daughters, so their tickets stand for seven people—the Fullers have two sons and one daughter, so they stand as five—the Misses Capel are four—the Reverend . . . ."

"Hold, enough! You are going on into unknown quantities, and my brain reels already. Must I be civil to all these people?"

"Oh, that's as you please!"

He took the list, read it through several times, and, resting his head upon his hand, dropped into a brown study. By and by, my aunt brought out her little walnut-wood table, trimmed her lamp, and sorted the playing cards. This done, they fell to piquet, and so spent the evening.

As for me, to sit on a stool at Hugh Farquhar's feet and pore over the book with the silver clasp, was delight and employment enough. Here were sketches indeed!—some in water-colours, some in pencil, some in sepia. Now a page of mere rough memoranda, faces seen from the window, fragments of capitals and cornices, and the outline of a boat with lateen sails—now a group of Tyrolean peasants, with green hats and embroidered jackets

—now a snow-capped mountain, a wild plain scattered over with strange plants, an indigo sky, and the word *Chimborazo* written in the corner. Next, perhaps, came a cluster of old houses—a bit of coast and sea—an Indian head, studied from the life—a curious plant, leaf, flower, and bud, all side by side—a caricature of a priest, with a gigantic black hat and a pair of spindle legs—a ruined tower and ivied arch; a bridge; a tree; a vase; and so on for, perhaps, a hundred pages! When I came to the end, I went back again to the beginning; and, save now and then to steal a glance at the bronzed face which I so loved to look upon, never lifted my eyes from the sketches. For here, at last, was the Art of which I had been dreaming all my little life—Art comprehensible, tangible, real and ideal in one! Here were places and people, vitality, action, colour, poetry, intention. The Paul Veronese was too much for me. It needed an art-education to pierce the mysteries, and appreciate the beauties, of that marvellous Lombardic school. Not so with Hugh Farquhar's sketches. They were amateur's work; often faulty, no doubt, but full of character and effect, and just suggestive enough to stimulate the imagination, and supply all that might be wanting in them as works of art.

At length the clock struck ten, and my aunt

threw down her hand. Though in the middle of a game, or at the most exciting point of the contest, she always stopped inexorably at the first stroke of the hour, and put the cards away.

"You are pleased with that book, Barbara?" asked Mr. Farquhar, speaking to me for the first time since they had begun to play.

"I never saw anything so beautiful," said I; and my face, I doubt not, was more eloquent of praise than any words I could have uttered.

He smiled and took the volume from me.

"Show me which drawing you like best," he said, turning the leaves rapidly.

I stopped him at a sketch of a ruined fountain, with a background of misty mountains, and an Italian contadina filling her pitcher in the foreground.

"I like that best of all!" I exclaimed.

"And so do I, *petite*. You have pitched on the best thing in the book."

Saying which, he opened his penknife, cut the leaf out, and placed it in my hands.

"Mercy alive!" cried my aunt, "you're never going to give the child that picture?"

"Indeed I am; and if it had been fifty times better, she should have had it! *Carina*, I have more of these, and bigger ones, at home. You shall come and spend a day with me, and go

through them all—and, perhaps, you may like the Paul Veronese better when you see it again. No thanks, little one—I hate them. Mrs. Sandyshaft, I have made up my mind!"

"To what, pray?"

"To the solemn duty of entertaining my dear eighty-five unknown acquaintances! What shall it be—a ball, or a dinner? Or both?"

"Both, by all means, if you really intend it!"

"Amen. And when?"

"How can *I* tell? You must put your house in order."

"And prepare to die! My dear Madam, your phraseology smacks of 'funeral bak'd meats,' and suggests uncomfortable results. Well, I must turn this matter over in my mind, and hold a cabinet council with my housekeeper—after that, *nous verrons!*"

With this he took his leave. I followed him to the porch, where Satan was waiting, fiery and impatient. There was no moon; but the stars shone keenly through the frosty night, and the stable-boy's lantern cast a bright circle on the path.

"Good night, little friend," he said, and touched my forehead lightly with his lips.

I could not bid him "good night" in return—my heart was too full; but I followed him with my eyes long after the dark had swallowed him

up, and listened for the last faint echo of his horse's hoofs. That night I took my darling picture up with me to bed, and placed it where I might see it when I woke. I was very, very happy; and yet I remember how I cried myself to sleep!

CHAPTER X.

THE BALL AT BROOMHILL.

OVERSHADOWED by a huge pear-tree in a snug corner of the orchard behind the house, stood a low wooden building, the roof whereof was clustered over with patches of brown moss and ashy lichens. The padlock on the doors was red with rust, and the spiders had woven their webs over the hinges. It looked like a place disused; but it was my aunt's coach-house, and contained my aunt's carriage. Never brought out, unless once a year to be cleaned, or on occasions of solemn ceremony, this vehicle reposed in dust and dignity, like Lord Nelson's funeral car in the vaults at St. Paul's, and led, on the whole, an easy life of it. The first time that I ever had the honour of being jolted in it, was on the day of Hugh Farquhar's great dinner and evening party, about five weeks after the events last related.

I say jolted, and I say it advisedly; for surely a more obstinate and springless piece of furniture never went upon wheels. When set in motion it uttered despairing creaks; going down-hill it staggered from side to side, like a drunken giant; and we never turned a corner but it threatened to pitch over. Notwithstanding these little eccentricities, it was the object of my special veneration; and Mrs. Inchbald's hero never saluted the wig of his uncle the judge, nor Friday the gun of Robinson Crusoe, more reverently than I did homage to this antiquated "leathern conveniency." Our difficulties on the present occasion were increased tenfold by the condition of the roads; for there had been snow the night before, and a frost towards morning.

"Bab," said my aunt, "I never thought I should have lived to do this."

My aunt was very grand this evening, and wore her black brocaded silk dress, her black and gold turban, and the *suite* of oriental amethysts which were given to her by her husband on her wedding-day.

"To do what, aunt?" I asked, clinging to a carriage-strap; for we were just going over a piece of road where the snow had drifted somewhat deeply, and our conveyance was labouring onward, like a lighter in a gale.

"Why, to dine at Broomhill, to be sure! Have you not often and often heard me say that I never exchanged a civility with the Farquhars in my life, or crossed the threshold of a Farquhar's door? And yet here I am, at my time of life, actually going to Broomhill to dinner!"

"But then you like this Mr. Farquhar," I suggested, "and . . . ."

"Don't say I like him, Bab. I tolerate him. He's an amusing madman with a remnant of brains; and I tolerate him. That's all, and a good deal, too; for he's the first of his name that I ever endured, living or dead! So! I never drove through these gates before, old as I am. Bab, sit still."

But I was all excitement, and could not have sat still for the world. We had now entered the park, and yonder, framed in by the gleaming snow and sable sky, stood the house, lighted from basement to attic, like a huge beacon of welcome. The avenue had all been cleared; but the great old oaks stretched their snow-laden arms overhead, and looked, by the ghostly light of our carriage-lamps, like gigantic branches of white coral. There was another vehicle some little way in advance of us; and when we came to within a few feet of the arched gateway, we found ourselves at the end of a line of carriages, each advancing a

few steps at a time, and setting down its occupants one by one. How my heart beat when it came to be our turn at last, and we drew up before the bright perspective of the lighted hall!

A powdered footman stood just within the entrance—a second took charge of our cloaks—a third announced us at the drawing-room door. I had never been to a party in my life before, and as we passed into the great room all ablaze with chandeliers and mirrors, I trembled and hung back. There were some twenty people or so, scattered about on sofas, or gathered round a table laden with engravings. From this group a gentleman disengaged himself at the sound of my aunt's name, and came forward to meet us. I scarcely knew him at first, in his close black suit and white cravat—he looked so unlike the fur-coated, careless Hugh Farquhar of every day! He bowed profoundly—so profoundly that I, in my ignorance, was quite astonished—and led my aunt to an armchair by the fire.

"I look upon this as a high compliment, Mrs. Sandyshaft," said he, "and rejoice to bid you welcome, for the first time, to my home."

The formality of this address, the stately politeness with which my aunt received it, and, above all, the sudden hush of curiosity that seemed to fall upon the assembled guests, struck me as some-

thing very strange. Not till years after, when I was old enough in the world's usages to interpret the enigma, did I understand why Hugh Farquhar paid her such public courtesy that evening, and how her presence there stood for a recognition of friendship, and the healing of old feuds.

Amid the brief silence that followed, more visitors arrived; and then the hum of talk began afresh. One after another, all the persons present came up and paid their compliments to my aunt, and, with very few exceptions, every face was strange to me. Most of them asked her who I was; some shook hands with me, and hoped I was a good little girl; and one old gentleman with white hair, looked at me attentively when he heard my name, and said that I was like my mother.

Presently the dinner was announced. Mr. Farquhar gave his arm to my aunt; the rest followed, two and two; and I found myself conveyed with the stream, and seated beside that same white-haired old gentleman, near the bottom of a very long table covered with glass and silver, glittering candelabra, and vases of delicious flowers such as I had never seen in winter-time before.

This meal was a stately solemnization, and, like that of matrimony, ended (so far as I was concerned) in amazement. Soup, fish, flesh, fowl, game, sauces, and sweets, succeeded each other in

bewildering variety, and promised never to come to an end. Being no great eater at any time, and, like most children, averse to rich and highly flavoured dishes, I amused myself by listening to the conversation that was going on around me, and observing everything and everybody in the room. There was Hugh Farquhar at the head of the table, with my aunt at his right hand and Tippoo standing stone-still behind his chair. He looked, I fancied, somewhat pale, and, though studiously courteous, was both grave and silent. Perhaps, having been so long a dweller in tents, he found these formalities irksome. Perhaps he felt himself a stranger in his own house and among his own guests, living another life, thinking other thoughts, and conversant with other topics than theirs. At the foot of the table where sat Sir John Crompton (a stout, jovial, fox-hunting, country baronet, in a blue coat with brass buttons and an expansive white waistcoat) there was ten times more enjoyment. Here the wine circulated more freely and the talk went briskly on, and all were neighbours and intimates. Captain Carter's blood mare and the marriage of Miss Rowland, the quality of Mr. Farquhar's Moselle, and that sad affair near Ipswich between the rural police and the Tenth Lancers, formed the staple subjects of their conversation. Meanwhile the ladies listened and

chimed in; and the younger people spoke low, and flirted; and the fat gentleman with the bald head took two helpings of everything; and the lady in the amber satin dress had the gravy spilt in her lap, and was so cross that she scarcely knew how to behave herself; and the clergyman at the opposite corner talked of hunting and shooting, and drank more wine than any other gentleman at the table. All this I noticed, and much more beside. Nothing escaped me—not even the new liveries on the footmen, or the new furniture that decorated the room, or the new paper on the walls —least of all the lovely Poussin that hung just opposite my seat, fresh as if newly dipped in the dews of "incense-breathing morn," and opening a vista into Arcadia. Having feasted my eyes on this till they grew dim, and having listened with delight to the pale-faced young man who made puns, and having asked endless questions of the kind old gentleman beside whom I had the good luck to be seated, I came at last to the end of my resources, and longed for liberty again. I looked at my aunt, and wondered whether she also was not tired of the dinner by this time; but she was talking to an elderly gentleman in glasses, and evidently not only enjoying her argument, but triumphantly getting the best of it. I looked all round the table, and saw none but smiling, flushed,

and occupied faces. To eat, drink, and be merry was the order of the hour; and, save in the countenance of the giver of the feast, I could nowhere read any lack of entertainment. He talked, it is true, but abstractedly. Once he looked up and found my eyes upon him, and so smiled, put his glass to his lips and nodded to me gaily; but that was the only moment when he seemed genuinely himself. And thus the dreary order of things went on and on; and what with the buzz and hum of conversation, the clatter of knives and glasses, the monotonous gliding to and fro of attentive servants, and the amalgamation of savoury scents which rose like "a steam of rich distilled perfumes" and hung over our heads as an oppressive canopy, I became quite weary and confused, and well-nigh dropped asleep.

At last Sir John Crompton proposed the health of "the ladies"—for toasts were not yet gone out of fashion — and after that my aunt and Lady Crompton rose from table, and we all went out in a rustling procession of silks and satins, and left the gentlemen to their claret. By this time it was nearly nine o'clock, and we could hear the musicians in the long gallery tuning their instruments and making ready for the ball that was to follow. It was now duller than ever. Some of the elder ladies gathered into

little knots, and chatted of their families, and their friends. The younger lounged about, and yawned over the engravings, or tried the tone of the piano. My aunt sat bolt upright in a high-backed chair, and had forty inflexible winks. I stole over to a distant window, and looked out at the snow which was falling fast again. Every now and then, strangely discordant with the white sepulchral calm of the scene without, rose the peals of laughter, and "the three-times three," of the revellers in the dining-room below. By and by, a carriage with gleaming lamps rolled noiselessly past the window; and then another, and another, till the room began to fill with fresh arrivals, and the gentlemen came up-stairs. Then coffee was handed round; and card-tables were opened for those who chose to play; and the rest dropped away by twos and twos, at the summons of the band-music, which now rang merrily out across the broad vestibule, and along the echoing staircases. My aunt sat down to loo, and my white-haired friend to whist. Nobody offered to take me into the ball-room, and no one spoke to me; so I kept by the window and listened longingly, and felt almost as lonely as I used to feel in my self-chosen solitude up in the old garret of my London home. A long, long time went by thus, and still more guests kept coming—chiefly young people, radiant

in delicate gauzes and flowers, and full of life and gaiety. Some of the girls were beautiful, and three or four of the gentlemen wore military uniforms. How I longed to see them dancing, and what a glittering scene I fancied that ball-room must be! At length the anguish of disappointment and neglect quite overcame my fortitude, and I leaned my forehead up against the window, and let my tears flow silently.

"What, Barbara here, and all alone!" said Hugh Farquhar's voice. "Why are you not in the ball-room, *mignonne?*"

Ashamed to be found weeping, I pressed my face closer to the glass, and made no answer. He laid his hand upon my shoulder, and bent down till I felt his breath upon my neck.

"Something is the matter, *carina*," he said gently. "Turn round and look at me, and tell me what it is!"

I could not bear his touch, or the tenderness of his voice; but trembled all at once from head to foot, and sobbed openly. In another instant he had taken a chair beside mine, had drawn me to his knee, folded his arms about me, and kissed me twenty times.

"Hush, hush, *Barbara mia!*" he murmured soothingly—"hush, for my sake, my bright-eyed Princess! I see how it is—she was forgotten—left all alone here in this dull room, and so grew sad

and wanted company. Hush, no more sobs, *petite!* You shall come with me to the housekeeper's parlour, and she shall wash away those tears from your cheeks, and then we will go into the ball-room together and have a dance!"

"Dance!" I repeated in the midst of my sorrow. "Shall *I* dance?"

"To be sure you shall, and I will be your partner! *Eccolà!* I thought the sunshine would soon come back again!"

With this he took me out of the drawing-room, and along a passage, and into a snug little apartment where there was an old lady in black silk filling out scores of cups of tea and coffee to send up to the visitors. At a word from Mr. Farquhar, this excellent old lady carried me off into an inner chamber, and there washed my face, brushed my hair, tied my sash afresh, and made me quite smart and presentable. Then he once more took my hand, and we went into the ball-room together.

The ball-room was the portrait-gallery; but the portrait-gallery transformed—transfigured—changed to fairy-land. It looked like a huge bower. The old portraits smiled out from environments of myrtle and holly—the walls, chandeliers, and music-gallery were festooned with devices of evergreens, crysanthemums, and winter heaths—there were coloured lamps and Chinese lanterns nestling in the leaves and suspended

along every pillar and cornice—the orchestra was hung with flags of many nations; and at the upper end of the room, filling with its single dignity nearly all the space of wall, hung the Paul Veronese. Add to all this a joyous crowd floating in couples through the mazy circles of that dreamy waltz which has disappeared of late years with all the poetry of motion; superadd the intoxicating music of a military band; and then conceive the breathless delight with which I paused at the threshold, hand in hand with the master of Broomhill, and gazed on the scene before me!

We had not been there an instant when a couple of waltzers stopped near us to rest.

"Fie, Mr. Farquhar!" said the lady, "you engaged me for this dance, and, like a recreant knight, failed to claim me when it began. What apology have you to offer?"

"One so insufficient that I shall throw myself on your mercy, Lady Flora, and not even name it," replied my companion. "My only consolation is in seeing that you have found a partner better worth your acceptance."

The lady laughed and shook her head—she was very lovely; a dark beauty, rich complexioned and haughty, like Tennyson's Cleopatra.

"That mock humility shall not serve you!" said she. "I mean to be implacable."

"Nay, then, I have indeed no resource left but exile or suicide! Choose for me, since you condemn me—shall it be arsenic or Algeria, Patagonia or pistols?"

"Neither. You shall expiate your sins on the spot, by finishing the waltz with me."

Hugh Farquhar smiled, bowed low, and encircled her waist with his arm.

"For so fair a Purgatory who would not risk perdition?" said he, gallantly.

She laughed again, excused herself to her late partner with a careless nod, rested one tiny hand and an arm sparkling with jewels, on Mr. Farquhar's shoulder, and so they floated away together, and were lost in the maze of waltzers. I sighed, and followed them with my eyes. The gentleman with whom Lady Flora had been dancing, saw that wistful glance, and took pity on me.

"Too bad to leave you standing here alone, little lady!" said he with some affectation, but much real kindness. "Where would you like to sit? Near the music?"

"Up yonder, by the Paul Veronese," I replied eagerly.

"Don't know him," said my new friend with a yawn; "but if he's there we can find him. What's his name?"

I could not have kept from laughing to save my life.

He stared and looked down upon me, and twirled his mustachios with his thumb and forefinger.

"The Paul Veronese—the big picture," I explained. "I should like to sit where I could see it."

"Oh, the six-thousand pounder!" said he. "Like to sit and look at *that*, eh? What an original idea! Come along!"

Saying which, he took my hand, piloted me in and out among the dancers, and placed me in a vacant chair by a window, at the upper end of the room.

"Will that do?" he asked. "Can you see it well? Are you comfortable?"

"Oh, yes, thank you!"

"All right!" said he; nodded languidly, and sauntered away.

Left to myself now, I watched the waltzers and looked out for the couple in which I was most interested. They swept past me presently, circling amid a number of others, and were gone almost before I had time to recognise them. Then the music ceased; the dancers fell into promenading order; and I waited and watched till they should again pass by. It was not long before the stream brought them round a second time. They were talking, and Hugh was bending down and looking in her face with such an expression on his own as I had never seen there before.

"I have had no motive to keep me here," I heard him say, "and without ties all men are Bohemians. If, however . . . ."

They went on, and I caught no more. Alas! I had heard enough, and, child as I was, that unfinished phrase woke me to a sudden passion of jealousy. I thought of his speaking eyes and the tender earnestness of his voice—I remembered the flushed smile with which she listened and looked down—I compared her with the rest, and saw that she was the loveliest in the room! Oh! a child's jealousy is as poignant, after its kind, as man's, or woman's—perhaps more poignant, because more unreasoning!

They came round a third time, and paused before the Paul Veronese. I was just near enough to hear, and listened eagerly.

"It is well placed," said she, "but not well hung. The light falls on it disadvantageously. Why not let it lean more forward? The effect would be infinitely better."

"I think so, too," replied Mr. Farquhar. "Would you like to see it done at once? Nothing could be easier."

"I shall be delighted."

"To delight you, Lady Flora," said he, "I would move every picture in the house."

With this he stepped aside, and spoke to a ser-

vant who was in waiting. The man left the room, and presently returned, bearing a set of library steps and followed by Tippoo. Some few of the guests smiled and thought it odd; but the greater number took no notice, and kept on dancing merrily.

"Now I really hope this is not very troublesome —or very difficult," said Lady Flora, standing by and toying with her fan.

"Did I not say before that nothing could be easier?" returned Hugh. "They have but to let the cords out longer, and the thing is done. Every inch added to the length of the cord, is an inch added to the incline of the picture. Gently, Tippoo—gently. Are those staples safe?"

"If it were to fall and get injured, I should never forgive myself," said Lady Flora.

"Good Heavens! I never thought of that," ejaculated he. "Stand aside—it would kill you!"

She laughed carelessly, and stepped back.

"I was not thinking of myself," said she. "But would it not be well to support it on this side?"

He nodded, was advancing to lend his aid, had his hand uplifted, when a shrill, inarticulate cry broke from the lips of the Hindoo, and the whole mass surged forward, like a falling house!

A universal shriek of horror—a sudden rush of feet—the closing up of an eager crowd and a

hubbub of frightened voices, is all that I remember for many moments.

"Dr. Topham!" cried some one. "Where is Doctor Topham?"

He was in the card-room. Before the words were well nigh spoken, some half-dozen gentlemen had flown to fetch him, and he, pale but self-possessed, came running in. They opened to let him pass, and closed after him directly, like parted water. Sick, trembling, standing on my chair, and yet scarce able to support myself, I leaned against the wall, and watched the crowd. I could see nothing of what was being done—hear nothing, when all were speaking—guess nothing, or dare to guess nothing, of what might have happened!

But I was not long kept in suspense. Presently the crowd swayed back and fell apart, and from the midst of it issued—oh, Heaven!—the inanimate body of Hugh Farquhar, pallid and blood-stained, and borne by two of his servants!

They carried him out, slowly and carefully, with Dr. Topham walking beside them. Then a dead silence fell on all the room—faces, lights, walls and ceiling seemed to rock to and fro before my eyes—a confused sound, as of many waters, came rushing to my ears, and I fell without the power to save myself.

I was lying in the same spot, partly hidden by

the window-curtains, when I recovered consciousness. No one had heard me fall, and in the general trouble no one had noticed me. Feeling very cold and faint, I sat up, rested my heavy head against the wall, and recalled the accident that had just happened. Was he dead? Or dying? Or only badly hurt? I dreaded to ask, and yet I felt that I must know; so I got, somehow, to my feet, and made my way over to a couple of gentlemen who were talking softly together in the embrasure of the nearest window. The elder of the two looked kind and serious. I plucked him by the sleeve to attract his attention.

"Oh, sir, if you please," I faltered imploringly, "is—is he dead?"

He looked at me very gravely, and shook his head.

"No, my dear," he said, "Mr. Farquhar is not dead; but . . . ."

"But what?" I implied rather than said, for my lips moved, though my voice died away.

"But we fear he is seriously injured. The picture knocked him down, and the frame came against the side of his head—in which case . . . ."

"In which case there is probably a fracture; and brain-fever, or something worse, may ensue," said the other gentleman, shrugging his shoulders. "Tush! we are here to-day, my dear fellow, and

gone to-morrow—gone to-morrow! What a vile night for one's horses! I believe 'tis snowing again!"

With this they looked out of the window, and I, sick at heart and trembling still from head to foot, crept away into a far corner and sat down in dumb despair.

One by one, the groups of whispering guests broke up and dispersed. One by one, the carriages drove noiselessly away through the falling snow. The musicians lingered awhile; then gathered up their music and their instruments, and departed likewise. At length only three or four stragglers remained, and when these were gone, a silence and solitude as of death fell upon the place.

Crouching all alone upon a form, I closed my eyes on the empty room and wondered wearily where my aunt could be. Now and then I heard the shutting of a distant door, and so held my breath and listened eagerly. Once I saw a servant flit through the hall; but he was gone in an instant, and never even glanced in to see whether any guest remained. Then the wax-lights in the sconces guttered and flickered, and went out here and there amid the fading flowers; and by-and-by, what with cold, fatigue, and weariness of spirit, I was fain to stretch myself along the com-

fortless form, pillow my flushed cheek on my arm, and fall asleep.

It was an uneasy slumber, and pervaded by a feverish sense of trouble. Was it a dream?—or did I wake once for a moment, to find myself being carried up a dimly lighted staircase, with Tippoo's olive face bent close to mine?

CHAPTER XI.

THE CRISIS.

"Grief makes one hour ten."—SHAKESPEARE.

HUGH FARQUHAR was indeed very ill, and it continued doubtful for many days whether he would live or die. To the torpid insensibility which weighed upon him for long hours after his fall, succeeded a burning fever accompanied by delirium. In this state he remained, with intervals of restless sleep or outworn exhaustion, for nearly a fortnight, during which time Dr. Topham stayed in permanent attendance at Broomhill, and my aunt went daily. Now that the time of trial was come, she proved, indeed, that if she could be a good hater, she could also be a good friend and true. On the third day, a famous physician came

down from London—a very stout and pompous gentleman, who saw the patient for about ten minutes; offered no particular opinion one way or the other; dined enormously; drank two bottles of old port; slept in the best bedroom; and went off next morning by the early coach, with a fee of fifty guineas in his pocket and an air of the utmost condescension and unconcern.

Oh, the weary days, how slowly they lagged by! From the morning after the Ball, when I woke with that strange sense of unexplained trouble at my heart, up to the time when Hugh Farquhar's illness came to a decided issue, seemed like the interval, not of days, but of months. My recollection of it is confused, like that of a dream, or chain of dreams dreamt long ago. Having slept at Broomhill on the night of the accident, I was sent home the next morning to Stonycroft Hall, and there left alone till evening, when my aunt came home. The sight of my white face and swollen eyelids, and the housemaid's story of how I had lain moaning on the rug before the fire, eating nothing all the day and refusing to be comforted, opened Mrs. Sandyshaft's eyes to the danger of leaving me alone. She decided, therefore, to take me with her for the future; and by ten o'clock the next morning, we were both at Broomhill. There we remained till the carriage came for us at four; and

so on for every succeeding day while he lay ill.

Not being allowed to enter his room, I passed away the hours as best I could. To linger aimlessly about the gardens, unconscious of the cold—to wander through the wintry park, watching the silent fading of the snow and wondering vaguely how it would be with him when all was melted and gone—to stand by the half-hour together looking up to the windows of his sick-room, and trembling if a hand but stirred the blind—to steal up when none were looking, and crouch down silently upon the mat at his chamber-door, listening and alert, like a faithful dog—to make my way fearlessly along the upper floors where the sheeted furniture stood ghostlike in dark corners, and so penetrate to the little room in the ivied tower where the books that he had last been reading were yet left piled upon the table, and his pipe lay beside his vacant chair, curled round like a green and golden snake laid asleep by the Charmer—to hope, till hope itself became agony—to despair, till despair became intolerable and tears brought something like relief—to count the ticking of the great clock on the stairs, or the drops that fell from the thawing snow in the fantastic gargoyles by the casement—to lie in wait for those who came out from his chamber, and entreat for tidings, though all

tidings were but a reiteration of the same doubts and fears—to wake every morning, and fall asleep every night, sad and sick at heart . . . this was my life, and this was how I loved him!

Those who had been his guests that fatal night sent frequently at this time to inquire for him, and Lady Bayham and Lady Flora came more frequently than any. They passed me once as I was wandering along the leafless avenue, and I turned aside at the sight of that beautiful dark face, and shrank from looking on it. Was she not the cause of all this evil, and had not I, according to my childish logic, the right to hate her?

At length there came a day—I think it was the twelfth or thirteenth—when Hugh, having been worse than ever all the previous night, fell into a deep sleep that endured for hours. Dr. Topham said the crisis was come, and we all knew that he would waken by-and-by to life or death. The long morning and the brief afternoon passed thus. Then the early dusk came on; and still my aunt sat motionless beside his bed, and still the servants crept noiselessly about with slippered feet, and voices bated to a whisper. The carriage came for us at four, as usual, and went back empty. Visitors were stopped at the courtyard-gate, and not suffered to approach. The striking weight was taken off the great clock on the stairs. It might,

indeed, have been an enchanted palace now, and all the living creatures in it, phantoms!

The dusk thickened and became dark, and there was yet no change. Unable to watch there longer without rest or refreshment, my aunt stole cautiously away, and the nurse and doctor remained with the sleeper. She came down to the housekeeper's parlour and placed herself silently at table. She looked paler and sterner than usual, and took no notice of my presence. Something in her face awed me, and I said nothing. She poured out a glass of wine and drank it, with her elbow resting on the table. Then she helped herself to meat. As she did this, I saw that her hands trembled. Presently she pushed the plate away, and drew her chair to the fire.

"I can't do it, Bab," said she. "I can't do it. The food seems to choke me."

I crept over to her feet, and rested my head against her knees. The sympathy of a mutual grief was between us, and not another word was spoken. She laid her hand upon my hair, and left it there. By-and-by the hand slipped off, and I knew by her breathing that she slept. Some time went by thus—perhaps three quarters of an hour—during which I watched the red caverns in the fire, and dared not move for fear of waking her. Once a coal fell, and she moaned

uneasily; and, after that, the French clock on the sideboard struck the hour. But she slept through it, and scarcely seemed to dream. All at once there came a footstep along the passage, and a hand upon the handle of the door. I started to my feet; but it was too late—my aunt was already aroused, and Dr. Topham was in the room.

"The danger is past," said he, breathlessly. "He is awake—he has asked for you—the delirium is gone—he will live!"

Whereupon my aunt rose up, sat down again, covered her eyes with her hand, and, after a moment's pause, said very softly and distinctly:—

"Thank God!"

As for me, I burst into a passion of tears, and thought my heart would break for very joy!

CHAPTER XII.

CONVALESCENCE.

HERE is a pleasant room overlooking a garden. The ceiling is lofty, and the cornice shows traces of faded gilding. Where the walls are not covered with pictures, they are lined with serious-looking books in suits of sober calf and classic Russia. Above the mantelpiece hangs an oval portrait of a dark-eyed lady, with her hair in powder. The likeness of a gentleman in a peruke and ruffles is suspended over the door. A small old-fashioned harpsichord stands in one corner, laden with *rococo* dragons in porcelain, and nicknacks in ivory and Japan. A huge screen of gilded leather, vaguely representative of Chinese life and manners, reaches across the lower end of the room. A cheerful fire burns in the grate, and the black cat on the rug enjoys it sleepily. So does the gentleman on the

sofa close by, as he lies with half-closed eyes, forgetting the newspaper which fell, just now, neglected from his hand, and the orange, ready-peeled, which waits on the table beside him. Without, the sun shines brightly; but here it is deliciously subdued, save where one long sunbeam slants between the crimson curtains and the green Venetians, and falls straight on the bended head of a little girl, who is half-sitting, half-lying, in the middle of the floor, surrounded by a wilderness of sketches. That languid invalid is Hugh Farquhar; that busy little girl, myself.

Alas! he is but the wreck of his old self, and sadly changed. The bronzing of many climates has all faded, and left a waxen pallor in its place. His cheeks are sunken; his eyes look unnaturally large; and there are deep hollows about his temples, where the veins show like thunderbolts. His beard, too, has grown longer; and his hands look whiter than a lady's, and feebler than a child's. The contrast, altogether, between his strength of make and his physical weakness is painfully apparent. The framework is there, but the framework only; gaunt, and ruined, and waste—mere bones, and flaccid muscle—a Hercules shorn of his strength. Looking up at him presently and considering these things, I see that his eyes are now quite closed, and that he has fallen into a placid sleep.

Let him rest. I will pore silently and contentedly over the drawings, till he wakes—are they not all the work of his dear hands?

Italian skies and clusters of dark pines; scraps of desert-scenery with processions of camels trampling their distorted shadows underfoot; glimpses of Algerian cactus-woods, and strange curves of Indian rivers where the jungle grows down to the water's edge—here were all these and more, fantastic as the changes of a dream!

At length I came upon a sketch that waked my curiosity, and set me thinking. It was a snow scene among Alpine peaks, with a group of figures on a ledge of rock beneath an overhanging precipice. One man lay stretched on the snow, and three others, clad in rough sheep-skins, stood round him, leaning on their lance-like poles. The wandering mists floated below their feet, and the everlasting summits rose above and around them. Who were they? Where were they? What catastrophe was this? Was he dead? What had killed him; or who?

"Why so earnest, signorina?" asked Hugh, waking presently. "Which drawing is that?"

I turned it towards him, and the smile died off his lips.

"Ah," said he, "that's a sad souvenir, *petite!* Put it away."

I laid it aside, and stole over to the footstool by the couch. It was always my place, now.

"I knew it was a true picture, Hugh," said I, coaxingly. "Tell me about it."

He closed his eyes, as if on some painful sight, and shook his head languidly.

"*Cui bono?* 'Twould make you melancholy," replied he.

"I like to be melancholy sometimes, Hugh."

"Nay then, *mignonne*, so do I! 'Tis a dainty liking, and we share it with the poets. Sure it must be Beaumont who says:—

> 'There's nought in life so sweet,
> Were men but wise to see't,
> But only Melancholy;
> Oh, sweetest Melancholy!'

Heigho! Barbara, you are a strange little girl, and I find myself talking to you as if you were a woman of forty! Show me the picture."

I brought it to him, and he looked at it for some seconds without speaking—then drew his finger along a little pathway which seemed as if trampled through the snow.

"This ledge of rock," he said, "stands four thousand feet above the valley, and the valley lies down yonder. That narrow track leads to a mountain village called Grieux, many hundred feet lower. There it is green and sheltered; but up here the

snow often falls, even in summer. These people are Tyroleans. I knew them well, and lodged in their cottage for many months; fishing and sketching, and chamois-hunting every day. François was always my guide and fellow-sportsman."

"Which is François?" I asked, eagerly.

He pointed to the prostrate figure, and then, in an altered tone, went on:

"That man with the white beard is old Loizet, the father of these three. François was his favorite son. The other two, Jean and Jacques, were good lads enough; but François was a fine intelligent fellow, brave as a lion, and so tender-hearted that I have known him bring home a wounded bird, and tend it in his own chamber till it could fly again. One day, when he and I were out, I brought down a chamois that stood poised on a solitary peak overhead. It fell, and, falling, became entangled in a clump of bushes, half-way down the precipice. Nothing would serve François but he must go and fetch it. To do this, he was forced to make a circuit of more than a mile, and when he was gone, I took out my book, leaned against a rock, and sketched this scene. By and by, I saw him on the peak. I waved my hat to him; and he began clambering down, agile as a monkey. On he came, a step at a time, lower, lower, lower, till within a foot or so of the chamois! Then he grasped

the upper branches of the bush with one hand, planted his foot on a projecting stone, stooped, uttered a wild cry, and .... I did not see him fall, Barbara. I saw the rotten branch give way and all his body sway forward—and I closed my eyes in horror, and *listened!*"

"Listened!" I repeated, in a low, awe-struck tone. "What did you hear, Hugh?"

"I heard a dull sound, as of something rebounding from ledge to ledge. When I looked up again he lay there, as you see him in the picture, dead —dead, within a few yards of my feet!"

I covered my eyes with my hands, and shuddered.

"What did you do then?" I asked, after a long pause.

"I went down, somehow, like one half-asleep, and found the old man cleaning his gun before his cottage-door. I cannot remember what I said. I only know that we went up the mountain together, Loizet, Jean, Jacques, and I, and that it was sunset when we reached the fatal spot. Then we bound our Alpine staves together, and bore the corpse down into the village. That was three or four years ago, Barbara; and his grave was quite green when I saw it last."

As he spoke these words, his voice sank almost to a whisper and he laid his head back wearily. I sat still, thinking of the story I had heard, and

wondering why and when he added the figures to the sketch. After a few moments, he came to it of his own accord, and said—

"The scene of that accident haunted me, Barbara, for months. I had it always before my eyes, and I dreamt of it nearly every night; so one day I took out my sketch and put all the figures in, as you see them. I thought it might take away something of the vividness of the impression—transfer it, in fact, from my brain to the paper. And it did. I thought less and less of it from that time, and at last it faded altogether. Now hide the picture away. I had rather not see it again."

I obeyed; gathered all the drawings into a folio; and crept back to my old place. To crouch there by the hour together, with no other occupation than now and then to fetch his medicine, or find the book he wished for, or peel his oranges, made me the happiest of creatures! Hugh had now resumed his paper, and we were silent for a long time. Presently the door opened, and Tippoo came in, with two cards on a salver.

"Lady Bayham and Lady Flora Percivale are at the door, Sahib," he said. "They wish to know if you are yet able to receive visitors."

Hugh looked at the cards, hesitated, and seemed as if he knew not how to answer.

"I had not intended to see anyone," said

he, "till I could get down to the rooms below."

"I can say that the Sahib has not yet left his chamber," said Tippoo, moving away. Hugh stopped him with a gesture.

"No, no," he exclaimed. "Tell them I regret . . . no, that I hope . . . Pshaw! that won't do —and they have called so often, too. Wheel the easy chair round to the fire, and put that medicine out of sight, and say that if they do not mind an extra flight of stairs, Mr. Farquhar will have the honour of receiving them! 'Lord Warwick, on thy shoulder will I lean',—come, Barbara, I am not going to be found on the sofa, anyhow!"

To help him across the room and put the table in order, was the work of a moment. As the ladies were announced, he steadied himself by the arm of the chair, and rose to welcome them.

I recognised Lady Bayham immediately. She had been one of the guests at the dinner-party, and even there, in the presence of many younger women, I was struck by her exceeding loveliness. Dark, queenly, rich-complexioned, like her daughter, she had probably been even more beautiful than Lady Flora at Lady Flora's age. Standing thus, side by side, it would have been difficult, even now, to say which was the most fascinating.

"Alas, Mr. Farquhar," said Lady Flora, when the first greetings were spoken, "I have never for-

given myself—never forgotten that I was the unhappy cause of all your suffering!"

"You ought never to have blamed yourself," replied Hugh, smilingly. "The fault, if fault there were, was mine only. Since, however, it has procured me the pleasure of this visit, I will not be so ungrateful as to regret even your remorse. You are very good to come up all these stairs to see me."

"It is a cheerful room for an invalid," said Lady Bayham, looking round observantly, "and has a quaint old-fashioned aspect, as if you had stolen it out of Kensington Palace, or furnished it after an interior by Hogarth."

"As a question of date, Lady Bayham," said Hugh, "your discrimination is perfect. This room was my grandfather's 'closet,' and he still occupies it in effigy. Yonder hangs his portrait. All that you see here was of his purchasing. He was a disciple of Horace Walpole and Beckford—a lover of ugly china, and a worshipper of idols. These were his favourite authors; some few old Romans, but mostly his contemporaries—Sterne, Fielding, Richardson, Thompson, and so forth. The room is fairly illustrative of the taste of that time. It became, after his death, my father's own peculiar den, and . . . ."

"And is now yours," interrupted Lady Flora. "Are you an idol-worshipper, also?"

Hugh shook his head, and smiled.

"We all have our fetishes," he said; "but I believe that mine are few. Old china, at all events, is not one of them."

"I wish I knew them, few as they are," said Lady Flora, musingly; "but I see nothing here which might serve to indicate them."

"If you would discover my tastes, you must first discover my *sanctum*," said Hugh, "and that, Lady Flora, lies beyond your ken."

"Ah, you have a *sanctum* also?"

"The holiest of holies."

"Where lies it?"

"That is a secret known only to Tippoo and myself."

"A blue closet! Oh, delightful! We will go in search of it, while you are too ill to prevent us."

"*Inutile*! This old house is a wilderness, full of dark corners, subtle staircases, and 'passages that lead to nothing.' You would only get lost, like Ginevra."

"That you might discover my skeleton, fifty years to come, and put it in a glass case for the world to wonder at! Mr. Farquhar, you are an agreeable prophet."

"Nay, the conclusion is your own."

"*Allons*, Sieur de Broomhill! do you defy me to discover your retreat?"

"Heaven forbid! I believe that you would then leave no stone unturned, and no door untried, till you had succeeded! I have too much respect for my own peace of mind ever to cast my gauntlet at a lady."

"Mr. Farquhar is a wise soldier," said Lady Bayham, with a languid smile, "and knows discretion to be the better part of valour. That is a charming head over the mantelpiece, and painted, if I mistake not, by Sir Thomas Lawrence."

"You are right, madam," replied Hugh, "Sir Thomas Lawrence's brush, and none other."

"Indeed, an exquisite head. What a touch! what colouring!"

"And what a subject! Really, mamma, you might spare some of your admiration for the nature on which this art has been bestowed. I never saw a more bewitching expression, or more speaking eyes! Who was this lady, Mr. Farquhar?"

"That lady," said Hugh, seriously, "was my mother."

Both visitors uttered an exclamation, and rose to examine it more nearly.

"I have seen Mrs. Farquhar many times," said Lady Bayham, after a brief silence; "but she was older than this, and much altered. She had bad health, I believe, for some years before she died?"

Hugh bent his head, and looked pained.

"Powder, too, was quite gone out before I married, and it was not till I came down here with my husband that I ever met your mother. Fashion, Mr. Farquhar—fashion, and a few years more or less, make all the difference to our sex!"

At any other time, and *àpropos* of any other topic, Hugh would probably have made the polite speech which her ladyship expected; but he contented himself with another bow, and silence. Lady Flora bit her handsome lip, and flashed a warning glance at her mother; but it was of no use. Her ladyship was obtuse, and went on scrutinising the picture through her eyeglass.

"The eyes, Mr. Farquhar, are like yours," she said. "The eyes and chin—but I see no other resemblance. She was more like you when older. You must have been young when she died. I should think you hardly remember her?"

"I remember her, madam," said Hugh, with a mixed grief and impatience in his voice, "more distinctly than I remember the events and people of a year ago. So distinctly that the subject is inexpressibly painful to me. Lady Flora, you have travelled, I think, in Italy—these sketches may, perhaps, interest you. Barbara *mia*, place the folio on the table."

I obeyed, and her ladyship, looking at me for the first time, asked who I was. He drew me

fondly to his side, and kissed me on the forehead before replying.

"Her name is Barbara," said he, keeping his arm round me. "Barbara Churchill; and a very formidable little damsel she is. Descended from no less a person than the great Duke of Marlborough, and mighty proud of it, also!"

Lady Flora smiled, raised her eyebrows, said "Ah, in-deed!" and became absorbed in the folio. Hugh, however, went on, without seeming to care whether she were interested or not.

"It was to this little girl," said he, "that I first showed my Paul Veronese—nay, more, it was to please her that I first had the packing-case opened in which it came from Venice. She is a great connoisseur, Lady Flora; a reader of parliamentary debates; a player of whist, piquet, and écarté; and, besides all this, my most especial friend, nurse, playmate, and companion. Upon my honour, I don't know what I should do without her. She has been my right hand ever since my illness—ay, and my left, too, for that matter!"

Lady Flora looked up at this and expressed herself "immensely interested," while Lady Bayham honoured me with such a long, cool, supercilious stare, that I felt myself grow red and hot, and knew not where to look.

"If your hatreds be as determined as your

friendships are enthusiastic, Mr. Farquhar," said she, "I should be sorry to offend you. Is your *protegée* a paragon?"

He turned and took me by the hand.

"There is but one Barbara," said he gaily, "and Hugh Farquhar is her Trumpeter! Lady Flora, that sketch of an Italian vintage was done near Naples, where the famous Lagrima Christi is grown—a wine of which travellers talk more than they taste; for very little is made, even in the most favourable seasons. *Mignonne*, run down to Mrs. Fairhead for me, and desire her to send up a bottle of that old Lagrima with the yellow seal—nay, I will take no refusal, fair guest. Duly to appreciate my sketch, you must drink of the vintage which inspired it. 'Tis but an illustration of an illustration!"

Delighted to escape, I hastened from the room and bounded down the stairs. At the foot of the second flight, I came face to face with my aunt, who, with the privileged freedom of an intimate, was going up unannounced.

"Well, Bab," said she, "I've come to fetch you home. How is he?"

"Lady Bayham is there," said I, "and Lady Flora."

"Lady Bayham and Lady Flora!" echoed my aunt, sharply. "Mercy on us! the man's hardly

saved from his grave yet, and they're here, husband-hunting, already! *I* won't go up. They're none of my sort .... a poor, proud, pretentious, scheming lot, without even ancestors to fall back upon! If he marries that woman, I'll never forgive him."

"Marries her!" I repeated, with a strange sinking at my heart.

"Gracious goodness!" continued my aunt, working herself up and getting very angry indeed, "she's thirty, if she's a day, and has been on hand these thirteen years, in spite of her fine eyes and her flirtations! I knew what they were after, sending, and calling, and leaving their trumpery coroneted cards every day! She hasn't a farthing, either—not a farthing. Bayham's over head and ears in debt—every acre mortgaged, and every tree! Aha, Lady Flora! Broomhill would suit your ladyship pretty well, even though it belongs to a commoner. There was a time, too, when you wouldn't look at a commoner! Pshaw, Bab, I've no patience with them. Let's go home, child."

"You won't go away without seeing Hugh!" I exclaimed, almost ready to cry.

"Why not? He has his grand friends with him."

"But he'd rather see you than all the grand friends in the world!"

"I'm not so sure of that," said my aunt; mollified, but unwilling to seem so.

At this moment, his bell was rung impatiently. I had forgotten all about the Lagrima Christi! To fly past my aunt without a word of explanation, fulfil my errand, and run back again, panting and breathless, was the work of a few seconds. But I had remembered it too late. Before the last vibrations of the bell had died away, I heard the rustling of their silks on the stairs; and, looking up, saw them already coming down. My aunt muttered something which was certainly no compliment, and turned away abruptly. I, taken by surprise, stepped aside, and knew not whether to go or stay. Lady Bayham swept by, dignified and unconscious; but Lady Flora paused, and graciously extended the tips of her fingers.

"Good-bye, little girl," said she. "What is your old-fashioned name? Tabitha—Dorothea—Pamela?"

"Neither," I replied coldly. "I am called Barbara."

"Ah, true—Barbara. Well, good-bye, Barbara. When Mr. Farquhar is better, he shall bring you some day to Ashley Park, to see me."

And with this she nodded and passed on, not without a prolonged stare at my aunt, who was, apparently, intent upon a painting at the further

end of the corridor. No sooner were they gone than Mrs. Sandyshaft came striding back, very red and excited.

"I like that!" said she. "Mr. Farquhar 'shall' bring you .... she answers for him already, hey? You shan't go, Bab. I'll not hear of it—I'll not allow it. An artful designing flirt! If I had my will, she should never enter these doors again. I repeat it, if he marries that woman I'll never forgive him!"

Whereupon, being very indignant, my aunt took three or four turns along the corridor to cool herself, and then went up two stairs at a time. As for me, sorrowful and unsettled, I wandered about below, wondering if Hugh would really marry Lady Flora some day, and thinking how sad a change it would make for me.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SILVER RING.

HUGH FARQUHAR was a long time getting well. Struck down when the snow lay on the ground, he was not able to mount his horse again till the primroses lay clustered at the roots of the old oaks in the woods. His first ride was to Stoneycroft Hall —his second to Ashley Park. It seemed natural to conclude, since his health was so far re-established, that our intercourse would be firmer, more frequent, more intimate than ever. It was now his turn to repay my aunt's long kindness—to drop in, as of old—to chat and squabble, and play piquet of an evening, and renew, with interest, all the pleasant meetings of long ago. And yet, from this time we saw less of him. He was no longer a stranger in the county; and we were not, as formerly, his only friends. Now that he was better, visitors and in-

vitations poured in upon him; and, though he cared little for society, he loved sport too well to decline the last hunting parties of the season. Still this was not all. A certain uneasy sense of change came over the spirit of our intercourse. Something of the old genial feeling was gone, and things were no longer quite the same. I believe, after all, that it was Mrs. Sandyshaft's own fault, and that from first to last she had but herself to blame. She had made up her mind that he should not like Lady Flora too well; and she could not, for her life, forbear to taunt him with the pride, poverty, and matrimonial designs of the Bayham family. She could scarcely have done anything more injudicious. He liked these people tolerably well, visited somewhat frequently at Ashley Park, and was received there as a welcome guest. What was it to him if Lord Bayham were in debt? His dinners were none the less pleasant, and his port tasted none the worse. Lady Flora might be thirty and a flirt; but she amused him, and he could enjoy her society without incurring the *peine forte et dure* of either courtship or matrimony. When first attacked by my aunt's petulent sarcasms, he laughed, and parried them. When he found them persistently levelled at himself, he grew weary. By and by, seeing the same thing persevered in, he became impatient. Thus it happened that

bitter things were sometimes said; that argument too often approached the confines of disagreement; and the old times never came back.

I missed him—oh, how I missed him! Latterly, as he was recovering from his illness, Broomhill had become almost another home to me! I was there nearly every day. I knew where to find his favourite books; how to fill his pipe; which flowers he liked best; when to be silent; and when to talk to him. Sometimes I almost wished that he could remain thus for ever, that I might for ever wait on him. Now, however, my occupation was gone, and I found myself forgotten. Let it not be thought that I blame him for it. I was but a childish handmaiden, and held but a childish claim upon him. He had all my heart, and gave me for it a kind word now and then; a stray caress; a passing thought when he had nothing else to think of. To him I was something less than a pastime—to me he was something more than my life. What wonder, then, that I grew pale and thin, and drooped like a neglected plant?

"Bab, you don't walk enough," said my aunt one warm spring morning. "You've lost all your colour, and you eat next to nothing. This won't do. Put on your bonnet, and lay in a stock of oxygen directly."

I obeyed, and took the path to the woods. To

reach them, I passed first through a large field where a single ploughman was driving fragrant furrows in the rich red earth, and then through a hop-garden, gaunt with poles, around which the young plants were just twining their first tendrils. Then over a high stile, and into the shade of the woods.

What words of mine shall describe the peaceful beauty of the place that day? The sky was grey and low, and there was a soft air abroad, heavy with gathered odours of May-blossom and wild hyacinths. The close young leaves made a sylvan roof above, and steeped every vista in a green and dreamy gloom. The birds sang to distraction in the uppermost boughs. The clouds met every now and then, and melted into a warm and gentle shower. In some places the ground was all golden with primroses, and in others the banks were so blue with hyacinths that no artist would have dared to paint them. By-and-by, I came to an open space carpeted with springy turf, in the midst of which stood a gamekeeper's cottage and a group of horse-chestnuts covered with white blossoms. Here a bloodhound sprang out of his kennel, straining to the full length of his chain, and barking at me till I turned aside into the close paths again, and wandered out of sight. Now I chanced upon a spot where the wood-cutters had lately been

at work. They had left the saw half buried in the stem of one tall beech, and another lay felled and stripped beside it, like the skeleton of the giant Pagan, in the Pilgrim's Progress. Presently a tiny brown squirrel darted by, and ran up a larch-tree; and, farther on, I saw a pheasant stalking through the faded ferns. Here it was more silent, more solitary, more sylvan than ever. I sat down to rest on an old mossy stump, listening to the silence and to those sounds that make such silence deeper. Now and then I heard the cuckoo's two sad notes; and, nearer, the cooing of a wood-pigeon.

"How pleasant it would be," thought I, "to live here in a thatched cottage with roses growing over the door, and drink new milk and eat wild strawberries every day! But then it should be always summer-time; and one would want to know the language of the birds, like the Prince in the fairy-tale!"

And then I remembered that Hugh had told me that story—told it to me one morning with his arm about my waist and his pale cheek resting languidly against a pillow . . . . and this remembrance brought tears with it. It is sometimes a luxury to shed tears; and to-day, in this balmy solitude, with the last slow drops of the passing shower yet falling around me, it was both sad and sweet to weep.

Suddenly, in the midst of the stillness, and so close that it seemed to come from behind the tree against which I was sitting, I heard the crack of a rifle! At the same instant something hissed past my ear; a small bird fluttered to my feet; a dog and a man came crashing through the underwood; a well-known voice cried—"My God! I might have killed her!"—and I found myself clasped in Hugh Farquhar's arms; safe, frightened, trembling, but very happy.

For the first few moments he was even more agitated than myself. Then he flung away his gun, sat down upon the broken tree-stump, held me at arm's length, and looked in my eyes till his own grew dim.

"Oh, Barbara—little Barbara!" said he, tenderly. "What should I have done if I had harmed thee?"

I nestled closer to him; and, for answer, laid my cheek down on his shoulder.

"I marvel," he went on, "that the ball spared thee, deary. See where it grazed the bark yonder; and see where the woodcock lies—why, it must have sped within an inch of thy head!"

"I heard something whistle by," I said, shudderingly; "but it all happened so quickly that I had no time for fear."

He kissed me on the forehead, and was silent after this for several minutes.

"It must be three weeks since I saw thee last, *mignonne*," said he, at length. "How the time slips through one's fingers!"

"It has seemed very slow to me, Hugh."

"Because you are young, happy, unoccupied—because life is fresh to you—because you count by impressions, instead of deeds. Tush, child, the sands will run fast enough by-and-by! Too fast—too fast!"

"Why *too* fast?"

"Because the world is a mighty pleasant place, and one would like thoroughly to enjoy it! Think of all the books that we must leave unread, all the pictures we must leave unseen, all the countries, people, sciences, experiences which we must forego for want of time to know them! I hate to be hurried, Barbara *mia*,—especially by that relentless old gentleman who carries the hour-glass and scythe!"

The dog, which had all this time been snuffing the fallen woodcock, now took it in his mouth, brought it gravely up, and laid it at his master's feet. A strange flash of expression passed over Hugh Farquhar's face.

"Pompey," said he, "what have I done, oh, most satirical of puppies! that thou shoulds't rebuke me thus? Lo! my very dog cuts jokes upon me, and turns up his tail in contempt of my philoso-

phy! Pompey, I confess it. I am a humbug—an egotist— a base, one-sided casuist! I love life; I grumble at death—and I shoot woodcocks! 'Tis Wordsworth who bids us

> 'Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.'

That's very good poetry, and better morality—yet Wordsworth ate game, like many a worse man."

All this was said mockingly, sadly, abstractedly, more to himself than to me. Having spoken, he paused with his chin in his hand, and sat for a long time, looking at the dog and the bird. His attitude was meditative, his complexion paler than before his illness, his expression more than usually thoughtful. I crouched by, looking at him, listening to him, treasuring up every syllable. Considering all things, I followed the intention of his words more nearly than might have been expected.

"*Petite*," said he suddenly, "when you don't see me for three weeks or a month together, do you ever think of me?"

"Think of you, Hugh!" I faltered. I did not dare to tell him that I thought of nothing else.

He laughed, and passed his hand over my hair.

"If I were to go away again," he said, "you would forget me."

"Never, Hugh! Never, so long as I live."

Startled by the earnestness of my voice, he

turned half round, took my head between his two hands, and looked at me.

"My child! my little friend!" said he wonderingly. "Why, what a pale face is this!"

I tried to smile; but the effort was too much for me. I felt my lip quiver and my eyes fill up, and so dropped my head upon his knee, and sobbed aloud.

"You—you won't go away, will you?" I cried passionately. "You won't go away—or—or marry Lady Flora?"

"Marry Lady Flora!" he repeated quickly. "What put that into your head? Who says it? Nay, child, I *will* know!"

"Everybody."

"And who is everybody, pray?"

"I—I don't know—Doctor Topham told us that . . . that everybody says so. Please, Hugh, don't be angry—I—I am so sorry; but it's quite true."

"Is it, by Jove?" exclaimed he, starting angrily to his feet, and striding to and fro. "What an obliging world it is, and how flattering is the interest with which it dives into one's private affairs!"

I saw that he was vexed, and so held my tongue and tried to subdue the sobs that kept rising in my throat.

Presently he came and stood before me.

"Upon my soul, Barbara," said he, with a bitter laugh, "I think I had better marry you, and stop the people's mouths that way! What say you? Will you be my little wife seven years to come?"

I knew it was a jest; and yet I felt my heart beat, and my cheeks grow scarlet.

"You don't mean it," said I; "and if you did . . . ."

"Oh, but I do mean it, though," returned he. "Put your hand in mine, and say 'Hugh Farquhar, seven years hence, when I am old enough, I will marry you.' Come, that's easy enough!"

I trembled from head to foot. I longed to say it, but dared not. He sat down, still laughing, drew me on his knee, and began disengaging a curious silver ring from a variety of seals and other trifles that hung at his watchguard.

"See now," said he, "I mean to betroth you with all due form and ceremony. This is an ugly thing; but a curiosity. I got it from an Arab in the desert near the Dead Sea, and gave him my penknife in exchange for it. Now, Barbara *mia*, say the words I told you, and you shall have the Arab's ring."

Seeing that I still hesitated, he went through the sentence again, and I repeated it after him, whisperingly and with averted face.

"Lady, by yonder blessed moon, I swear," said

he, placing the ring with mock solemnity on the third finger of my left hand, "that tips, most appropriately, with Arabic silver all these fruit-tree tops . . . . . unfortunately the moon is absent just now, on a visit to our antipodes; but we can do without it on the present occasion! Now kiss me, Barbarina, and promise not to say a word of this to anybody."

I gave the promise readily.

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" said he, "now I'll give 'everybody' something to gossip about! I'll proclaim that I am an engaged man . . . what a joke! what a mystery! what a test! By Jupiter, if the Bayhams have any design . . . ."

He paused; put me gently aside; rose; and again paced backwards and forwards, his eyes fixed on the ground, and his hands clasped behind his back. Coming back presently to where I was standing he saw me still occupied with the ring.

"You cannot wear it, *mignonne*," he said. "It is twice too large for your little slender finger."

"But I want to wear it, Hugh. Always to wear it."

"Do you? Nay, then, you shall have my guard, and carry it round your neck, like a locket. Do you see those curious characters engraved upon it? They are Arabic letters, and spell the name of Allah. So—that's capitally contrived. Now re-

member, Barbara, if any one sees it, or asks you about it, say I gave it to you—not a word more or less."

It was a tiny elastic guard, no thicker than a thread, and, having attached the ring to it, he put it with his own hands round my neck.

"Life is made up," said he, "of curious chances. I began by nearly shooting you this morning, little one, and I have ended by . . . Pshaw! a betrothal is better than a bullet, anyhow! Seven years—seven short, long, pleasant, miserable years. How much taller do you mean to be by then, Barbara? 'Just as high as my heart,' as Orlando saith of Rosalind? Why, body o' me! how seriously the darling takes it! Pale one minute, red another, and trembling like a frightened fawn. Come, this won't do, Barbara. Cheer up, and bid me good-bye; for I have brought down but this one bird to-day, and I must offer up more sacrifices to Cupid before I go home."

I forced a smile, and put up my face to kiss him.

"Good-bye, Hugh," I said. "When are you coming again?"

"I'll come—let me see . . . I'm engaged for two days—three days this week, and to-day is Monday. Well, *petite*, I'll come on Friday."

I flushed all over with delight.

"Will you, really?" I asked, with my whole heart on my lips.

"I will, really. Now go home before the next shower comes up. Adieu, my lady-love."

And with this he pressed his lips once again to my cheek, bagged the woodcock, whistled to Pompey, shouldered his gun, and, with a last wave of the hand, plunged into the copse and disappeared.

I sat there a long time—long enough for the shower to come and go, and the shadows perceptibly to shift upon the grass. Once I heard the distant echo of his gun; but I remember only that, and the strange, vague, dreamy wonder with which I sat looking at the ring. He had asked me to be his "little wife" seven years to come. Was he not both in jest and in earnest? What did it all mean, and how was it to end?

By and by I adjusted the chain in such a manner that no one could observe it, and went home. The day thus went by, slowly, deliciously, like a perplexed but happy dream; and that night I fell asleep with the ring clasped tightly in my hand, and that name that he had given me yet lingering on my lips.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ROUNDING OF THE YEAR.

"Adieu, mes beaux jours!"—MARIE STUART.

THE Friday morning came—the morning of the day on which Hugh had promised to call. I had been conscious of it all night, in my dreams; and now, as the first sunbeams touched my window-panes, I woke, knowing that the weary days of waiting had gone by, and I should see him soon again.

The morning was brilliant, mistless, and crimson towards the East. It was yet very early; for yonder, across a field just opposite the house, went the labourers to their work. Although it was not yet time, I rose and dressed, opened the casement, and leaned out into the fresh air to gather a few leaves from the myrtle that clustered without. Reaching forward thus, bathing my head in the sunshine

and my little white arms in the dew of the dark leaves, it occurred to me all at once that this was the month of May again, and that I had been here just one year.

Yes, a year, a whole year, during which I had beheld all the changes of nature; seen the green things flourish and die, and be born again; witnessed the fading of the frost and the falling of the snow; and watched how the morning sun varied in his rising as the months rolled on. It seemed but yesterday when yonder dusky fallow was yellow with corn—when the oak beside the pond wore a brief livery of scarlet and gold—when the blackberries lay thick in the hedge, and the dead leaves rotted in the lanes. What a happy year, and how quickly it had flown! I had heard little from London all this time. A formal letter was once or twice exchanged between my father and my aunt; but excepting that my sisters were well, that Miss Whymper continued as usual to teach them, and that dear old Goody always sent her love, I knew nothing of my home or its inmates. I fear I had not much thought or care to know more. Happy and unrestrained, I only desired to stay here for ever.

> "Ahi! con che affetto amore e il ciel pregai
> Che fosse eterno sì dolce soggiorno!

By and by, finding that as yet there was no one

stirring in the house, I got a book, curled myself up in the embrasure of the window, and began to read. I remember the book as well as possible—it was Dodsley's translation of Boccaccio, and the story was Griselda—but I also remember that I could not keep my attention to the tale; that my thoughts wandered away to Hugh Farquhar and my hands to the silver ring, and that I fell into a long dream from which I was at last aroused by the swinging of the garden-gate, and the halting tread of the lame postman on the gravel walk. Seeing me at the window, he touched his cap and smiled, then left the letters in the porch, and hobbled away again with his leathern satchel swinging at his side. I watched him to the turn of the road, and then, knowing by this time the household must be awake and stirring, went downstairs.

I found my aunt in the breakfast parlour. She was standing at the window with her back towards me, and an open letter in her hand. An indefinable something in her attitude, in the way that she kept her head turned from me, struck me the moment I went in. I was about to speak; but hesitated and stood still. She then folded the letter up, slowly and deliberately, and came over to the breakfast-table. Silently I took my accustomed seat in the great carved chair opposite. I felt that something was wrong. I saw that she

was pale, and that her hand trembled. She laid the letter beside her plate. I could not see the writing; but the seal looked like my father's, large, round, and firm, with showy armorial bearings.

A weary quarter of an hour went by, during which I ate little, and my aunt nothing. Now and then she cast a troubled glance at the letter; but she only once lifted her eyes to my face. Had I done anything to offend her?

The silence became oppressive, and seemed all the more intolerable for the sunshine and splendour of the outer day. The hall was flooded with a golden light, and the pleasant farm-house sounds came mingled with the singing of the birds. Oh, how I longed to be out in the free air, and what a relief it was when my aunt pushed back her chair and said:—

"Bab, I have letters to write this morning, and must be alone. Go out and amuse yourself till ten o'clock."

Welcome permission! To call the dogs, tie on my broad-brimmed country hat, and dance away, revelling like a butterfly in the sun, was for me but the work of a few seconds. Down the "chequered shade" of the green lanes; across the meadow, yellow with buttercups; through the churchyard where the vicar's old grey cob was

grazing; up the drift where the hay which they had been carting late the night before was yet clinging to the hedges on either side; over more meadows and through more lanes we went, and thus came back towards home so warm and weary that I was glad to sit down, at last, under the shadow of a clump of young alders, and rest till it was time to go in.

"Cuckoo!" intoned the messenger of summer, from a copse close by; and then I remembered the old German superstition, and said to myself—"Yes, I shall be here next year! I shall still be here, and I shall still be happy!"

Presently the church clock far away chimed the three-quarters, and I went home. My aunt was waiting for me at the gate. She shaded her eyes with her hand when she saw me coming, and looked at me earnestly.

"Come here, Bab," said she, stalking up the path before me, and taking her seat in the porch. "Come and sit here. I have something to say to you."

I sat down, my heart fluttering with a vague apprehension; and my aunt presently began.

"Your father and I have been writing to one another lately, Bab," said she. "Our correspondence is over now, however. I had a letter from him this morning, and I've answered it, and sent

my answer to the post; and there it ends. What do you suppose we have been writing about?"

I shook my head. How should I know what they had been writing about?

"Well, Bab, we've been writing about you."

"About me?"

"Yes, and as you must know the issue of it, it is only right that you should also know the foregoings. I wrote first, Bab. I wrote to ask your father to leave you with me always. You have been here a year, Bab, and, somehow, I have got used to you—like to have you about me—believe you to be a true child, and . . . and fancy you have some kind of love for me, old and disagreeable as I am. Hush! not a word. Listen to me patiently; for I have more to tell you. Well, Bab, I wrote to your father and told him something of this. I offered to bring you up, educate you, and be a mother to you. I never had a child of my own, and I should have liked to keep you while I live, provided you were willing, Bab—always provided you were willing."

"Willing!" I repeated, with clasped hands and tear-filled eyes. "Willing!"

"Ay—willing—which I believe you would be. Well, don't let's be foolish, child. There's more to come. Your father answered my letter, and said neither 'yes' nor 'no;' but bargained with

me, Bab—bargained with me—tried to trade on the love I bore you, and turn it to his profit! Didn't I say it from the first? Didn't I guess it from the first? Didn't I tell you that I would be your friend for life, but bid you count on nothing —nothing—nothing at my death? Answer me, child—do you remember it?"

Trembling, I bent my head, but had no power to speak. It frightened me to see her in these moods, and I knew that this was, of all topics, the one which moved her most. She rose and took a turn or two outside the porch, looking strangely angered and excited—then came back, resumed her seat, and went on.

"Your father, Bab," said she, speaking very calmly, but with a quivering undertone in her voice, "is a very clever, worldly, calculating man —a little too clever, sometimes, and a little too worldly; apt to speculate over-far on other folks' weaknesses; apt to overreach himself, now and then .... but no matter! Now what do you think your clever father proposed to sell you at—eh, Bab?"

"Sell me!" I exclaimed, the indignant blood flushing all my face. "Sell me!"

"Ay, 'tis a rough word, but the right one, Bab —chafe under it if you will! He proposed—listen to this—he proposed that I should not only

keep, educate, and provide for you; but that I should will my property to you and your two sisters, share and share alike. Fancy that—share and share alike!"

Dumb with shame, I could only clasp my hands and hang my head.

"Well, the wonder is that I didn't tear his letter into a hundred bits, and send them back by the next post," said my aunt, getting excited again, but striving hard to keep calm. "But no—I waited two whole days, and thought it all out from beginning to end before I answered it. What I then said, Bab, I may as well tell you. I refused his conditions point-blank. I would have nothing to say to his two elder girls—they are nothing to me, and always will be nothing. I refused to bind myself by any promises, even on your account. But I told him that if he left you here and trusted to my justice and generosity, you should be no loser at my death. What I meant by that is neither here nor there, Bab. It might have been all—it might have been half—at all events it would have been enough; but what I insisted on was the trust; and what I hate most in all the world is to be dictated to!"

"Well—and his answer?" I asked eagerly.

"Tush, Bab, let's make a long story short! We argued, and bargained, and wrote three or

four letters, and couldn't come to an agreement anyhow. This morning I received what he is pleased to call his *ultimatum;* in which he distinctly states that I must either keep you on his terms, or send you home. He counts on my love for you—he believes that sooner than part from you, I will consent to anything! Well, to-morrow morning he will have my answer. It's written, and it's gone, and it's all over. Bab, I . . . . I . . . ."

She paused, and her lip trembled. As for me, I rose up, sat down, rose up again, and shook from head to foot.

"You won't send me away!" I cried. "You —you won't send me away!"

"Bab," said she, with averted face, "your mother was my favorite niece. I loved her dearly; but she married against my will, and from the day of her marriage I never looked upon her face again. It cost me a deep sorrow; but I did it, and I would have done it, had it cost me twenty times that sorrow. Your father and I have been enemies ever since, and our enmity will henceforth be deeper than before. I cannot be his tool and plaything, Bab—I cannot, and I will not!"

"Still you won't send me away!" I repeated with increasing agitation. "You won't, you can't send me away!"

She remained silent for a moment. Then, nerving herself to firmness, said:—

"You must go home, Bab. I have said it."

Go home! The words struck upon my ear, but bore no meaning with them. Stunned, despairing, dumb, I stood before her, and neither spoke nor wept. Presently she also rose, and turned as if to go into the house; but our eyes met, and she paused with her hand on the latch.

"When?" I whispered, rather than said.

She shook her head, and sighed heavily.

"When the coach comes by to-morrow," she replied tremulously. "The sooner it's over the better, Bab—the sooner the better!"

An involuntary cry of anguish escaped me, and I sat down silently, looking at her.

"God help us, Bab!" said she; then stooped, kissed me hurriedly on both cheeks, and went into the house.

Oh, the weary, weary day! Oh, the heavy hours—the dreary dinner-meeting—the heartache, the languor of soul, the tears kept back, and ever rising! All that afternoon, I wandered like a restless spirit through the dear familiar places. I visited the orchard, the sheep-fold, the churchyard, the meadow where I heard the cuckoo in the morning, and the mossy stump in the woods, where

Hugh Farquhar sat three days ago. To each I said "good-bye;" and yet, though I looked and lingered, and tore myself away, I could not believe it was for the last time. My only hope was to see him in the evening; my only comfort was to clasp the silver ring more closely to my heart. Somehow or another, I had a vague idea that he alone could help me, now; and, till I had seen him, I would not quite despair. Was he not my ideal of goodness and bounty, wealth and power? Was he not still my hero and my prince, and was it not natural that, even in this strait, I should look to him for succour?

The day faded out of the sky; the twilight thickened; the stars came out one by one; and still I waited, hoped, believed. All the afternoon my aunt had been shut up in her own room, and now she and Jane were preparing for my departure. There was no one to forbid me; so I went out and stood by the gate in the dim starlight, listening for his coming. The night air fanned my forehead and cooled my eyes, weary as they were, and hot with weeping. Yonder gleamed the light at my chamber window, and now and then a shadow flitted across the blind. I could not help looking towards it, for I knew what was going forward within—knew that my box was being packed, and that to-morrow I must go. Alas! there

was both grief and anger at my heart, as I turned away again and gazed into the gloom towards Broomhill. My only hope lay in Hugh Farquhar and his influence; and ever as I waited, counting the minutes and the beatings of my heart, that hope grew stronger.

But he came not. One by one the quarters chimed out from the church-tower over the meadows—then nine o'clock struck—then the quarters, one by one again—then ten o'clock, and I knew that the last chance was past.

He had forgotten his promise, and I must go without even bidding him farewell!

CHAPTER XV.

A DREARY WELCOME HOME.

WOULD she really let me go? Not till the last moment could I bring myself to believe it—not till the last moment, when the coach stood at the gate and the time had come to say "good-bye." Then by her pallor, by her silence, by the stony determination written in every line of her countenance, I saw that it must be. Sick, giddy, quite worn out with sorrow and wakefulness, I suffered myself to be drawn to her bosom, and felt that she kissed me twice on either cheek.

"Good-bye, Bab," she said, hoarsely. "Heaven bless you!"

But I had no strength to answer—I could not even weep. I could only put one little cold hand in hers, and dumbly, drearily, turn away and follow Jane to the gate. The guard was waiting with

the door open, impatient to be gone; and in another instant I felt myself lifted in; heard the starting-signal given; caught one brief glimpse of Jane with her apron to her eyes; saw that my aunt was no longer at the porch; and found myself speeding away—away towards London.

I can recall little or nothing of what followed, except that the coach was empty, and that I lay back in a corner, stupefied and motionless. Once I put my hand up to my face and found my cheeks were wet; and I recollect wondering whose tears they were, and how they came there; but beyond this I seemed to notice nothing. At Ipswich we stopped, as usual, for an hour; and later in the day I remember waking up, as if from a deep dream, and finding the coach quite full of passengers. How or when they took their places, and of what age, sex, or station they were, I have no idea. I only know that they came and went like the hedges that flitted past the windows, and that, drowned in the Lethe of my discontent, I took no heed of anything.

As the day waned we drew near London, and, towards twilight, came upon gas-lamps and a road bordered by villas. Presently the villas were succeeded by long rows of houses; by shop-windows blazing with lights; by streets crowded, noisy, narrow, and alive with traffic. Then we turned sharply

down a by-street, dived under an archway, clattered into a gloomy yard, and were at the end of our journey.

The passengers alighted, and were met by those who awaited them. I also got out and looked anxiously around, expecting Goody. But no Goody was there. Bewildered by the unusual noise and bustle of the place, I wandered to and fro, scanning every countenance, and recognising none. Then the luggage was unladen, and each passenger claimed his own. When my box was handed down, I sat on it and waited wearily. One by one, my fellow-travellers then dispersed and went away; and only the empty coach, the smoking horses, and the busy ostlers remained.

It was now quite dark, and a searching wind came blowing through the archway. No one looked at me; no one spoke to me—save once, when the coachman bustled past, a mountain of coats and capes, and gave me a rough "good night." Shivering, I sat perched upon my box, like the dwarf in Mrs. Shelley's story, and watched the stable-boys running to and fro with their lanthorns, the grooms rubbing down the horses, and the chamber-maids flitting along the wooden-galleries above. Surely Goody had mistaken the hour, and would be here presently! Could it be

possible that my aunt's letter had never been delivered? What should I do, if no one came to fetch me home?

Whilst I was turning these questions over in my mind, and striving hard to be brave and hopeful, an old man came hobbling across the yard, and peered curiously into my face. He was the oddest, driest, dustiest little old man I ever saw; and which was strangest of all, had a boot drawn up on each arm and slippers on his feet, so that he looked as if his legs were in the wrong place.

"To be left till called for?" said he, in a hoarse interrogative whisper.

Vaguely conscious of his meaning, I nodded; whereat he desired me to "come on," and limped away, beckoning mysteriously with his boots, like the ghost in Hamlet. Wondering, and half unwilling, I followed him to a little open doorway under the foot of the great wooden staircase. On the threshold of this place I shrank back, and hesitated. I had fancied that he was taking me to some room where Goody was waiting; but this was a mere den, filled, like a cobbler's stall, with rows of boots and shoes, and lit by a rushlight in a bottle.

"Come in," said he in the same tone, half-growl, half-whisper. "Come in. Don't be afeard."

Saying which, he crouched down on a box, and

pointed with the toe of the right boot at a wooden stool in the corner.

Somewhat reassured by this invitation, I ventured in and sat where he directed. A long silence followed, during which I balanced myself on the edge of the stool; gazed curiously at the shelves all laden with boots and shoes, old bottles, blacking-brushes, and broken candlesticks; and now and then stole a side glance at my entertainer.

"It's a queer place, ain't it?" he observed, resting his elbows on his knees, and rocking himself slowly to and fro. "Better to wait in than the yard; but a queer place to live in. A queer place to live in."

The position in which he was now sitting and the action by which it was accompanied, projected so hideous and grotesque a four-legged shadow on the opposite wall, that for some seconds I could only sit and stare at it, like one fascinated.

"Do you live here, sir?" I asked, presently. It was the first time I had spoken, and, despite my politeness, my voice trembled.

"Live here!" he echoed. "Ay. All day—every day. From year's end to year's end."

I was more amazed than ever, and, not knowing what to say next, looked from him to his shadow, and thence up to the inverted stairs overhead, thick-set with cobwebs and studded with rusty nails.

"But I don't sleep here," said he, after another pause. "I sleep in the stables."

To which I replied timidly, that I was glad to hear it; and again the conversation dropped.

The silence this time was so prolonged that I twice heard a neighbouring clock chime the quarters; and still the wind moaned drearily; and still horses, and ostlers, and travellers came and went in the yard without, and busy footsteps passed up and down the stairs above our heads, over and over again. Feeling at length desperately tired and sleepy, I fell to counting the boots and shoes to keep myself awake. I counted them from left to right—then from right to left—then took each alternate one, and went backwards for the rest, and only grew more drowsy than ever for my pains.

"You're looking at *them*," said the little old man, suddenly. "There's lot's of 'em, ain't there? Lots of 'em."

"Ye—es, sir," I faltered, somewhat startled to find that he had been watching me. "A great many."

"Twenty-seven pair," said he reflectively. "Twenty-seven pair, not counting the odd Hessian belonging to number thirteen with the gout."

Greatly perplexed by this observation, I hesitated, wondered, and at last suggested that he surely possessed more than he wanted of these useful articles.

"Oh, you think they're all mine, do you?" croaked he, shifting quickly round, and peering at me again from beneath a pair of bushy white eyebrows. "Who d'ye suppose I am, eh? Who d'ye suppose I am?"

I shook my head doubtfully.

"I'm BOOTS," said he, striking himself impressively on the breast with the heels of the pair which still remained on his arms. "BOOTS"—and immediately tucked up his legs, and sat tailor-wise on the box.

Utterly discomposed and overwhelmed by this tremendous revelation, I sat with parted lips and stared at him breathlessly. Boots! Boots incarnate! Good Heavens, was he mad, and could it be his propensity to wear Wellingtons as other folks wear gloves?

"I've lived here, man and boy, going over sixty year," continued he. "I was a young chap when I first came. They picked me out of the gutter, and made Boots of me; and Boots I've been ever since."

I began fervently to wish myself out in the yard again.

"The place has changed names and masters more than once all that time," he went on; talking, indeed, rather to himself than me. "But I belong to it, like the sign outside, or the big clock

on the stairs. Blue Boar, or Red Lion, or White Horse, it's all the same to me. I'm a part of it; and, somehow, I seem to fancy that so long as the old house holds together, I shall hold with it."

He fell musing at this, and gazed at the boots and shoes for a long time without speaking.

"See them, now," he said at length. "See them. They've been my business, my companions, my amusement these sixty year and more. You'd never guess the stories they tell me, or the news I pick out of 'em. Shut me up from the light of day and give me only these, and I'll tell you the changes in the fashion, the season of the year, and the state of the weather."

Finding that he looked to me for a reply, I ventured to enquire if he always had so many as seven and twenty pairs.

"Sometimes more," said he briskly, "sometimes less. It depends on the time of the year and the state of the markets. Twenty pair a day is the average I make of it, my dear. Twenty pair a day."

I made up my mind that he was very mad indeed.

"Look here, now," he continued, untucking his legs, and getting up to hunt for a fragment of old slate and a morsel of chalk, which lay with a heap of other rubbish on an upper shelf—"look here.

Twenty pair a day, counting seven days to the week, and fifty-two weeks to the year, and letting leap-years alone, makes just four hundred and thirty-six thousand, eight hundred pair in sixty years. Think of that! Four hundred and thirty-six thous . . . I've a bad head for most things—'specially for figures—but I've done it hundreds of times, and it always comes to the same. It's right. I know it's right."

"That is a great many, sir, for one person," I observed nervously.

"Ay, a great many. Sometimes I wonder if I shall live to make it five hundred thousand, and then I think I'd like to have them write it up on my gravestone, for the queerness of it. Four hundred and thirty-six thousand, eight hundred, in sixty year!"

With this he again began rocking himself backwards and forwards, and fell into the old reverie. And still the wind howled, and the footfalls echoed, and I sat staring at him by the light of the flickering rushlight. By and by a bell rang close outside the door of the den—a shrill, impatient bell, with a vixenish tongue—and a voice somewhere in the galleries cried "Boots!"

My companion shook his head, and got up wearily.

"That's it!" he growled. "That's it. Nothing

but ring, ring, ring, from morning till night, and from night till morning. Keep you there, little girl. I'll be back presently."

And so, with his head bent forward and his arms crossed behind, he shambled away, looking like a man who had folded his legs over his back, and was walking off on his hands.

Left alone now, and feeling very cold and tired, I shut the door, and curled myself upon the box where he had been sitting. Again the clock struck —this time four quarters, and then nine strokes for the hour. Nine o'clock, and the coach came in at half-past seven! Was I quite forgotten, and must I remain all night in this strange place? What would my aunt say, could she but see me now? Would the little old man give me shelter, and let me sleep there with the boots and shoes while he went to bed in the stables? How should I find my way home in the morning? And what would Goody do, when she found that I had been left in this plight all the dreary night? Despite my fortitude, I could not forbear a few self-pitying tears. Then my thoughts wandered and my eyelids grew heavy, and I fell into an uneasy sleep, during which I dreamed that I was once more in the coach, travelling to London; the only difference being that Goody was driving, and that we were drawn by a team of four hundred and thirty-six thousand pairs of polished Wellingtons.

I cannot tell how long I slept. It may have been more than an hour, or it may have been but a few moments. Deep as my slumber was, however, the flashing of a sudden light across my eyes awoke me.

"Barbara," said a quick distinct voice, close beside me. "Barbara!"

Struggling drowsily upright, I looked round and saw my father. He had his hat on, and a large cloak with a fur collar and clasp. A waiter stood behind him with a candle, and Boots was peeping in at the door. At first I could scarcely recollect where I was; but no sooner did my father speak again than it all flashed back upon my memory.

"I am willing, of course," said he, in his old imperative tone, "to pay anything you may demand for the—the accommodation you have afforded her. Faugh! what a hole!"

"Very sorry, sir," said the waiter, obsequiously. "Had no idea the young lady was here at all, sir. All Boots's doing, sir—not our fault, I assure you."

"Boots, Boots, indeed!" echoed my father, angrily. "Pshaw, where is the fellow? I'll teach him to .... Ho, you're there, are you, sirrah? Tell me how you dared to bring any gentleman's child into such a filthy cellar as this?"

Boots looked down and made no reply, which only irritated my father the more.

"You may be thankful," said he, "that I don't complain of this to your master. Stand out of my way!"

Saying which, he grasped me by the arm and dragged me across the yard, to where a hackney coach was waiting in the shelter of the archway. Sick with terror and cold, I shrank into a corner of the vehicle, while my father, still storming at the apologetic waiter, flung himself into the opposite corner, and bade the coachman drive on.

The wind had now brought rain with it, and the streets were wet and empty. Scarcely a shop was open, and scarcely a creature stirring. Sitting there opposite my father and feeling that I dreaded him more than ever, I gazed out at the dreary night, and dared not speak or stir. We had a long, long distance to go, and I remember as well as if it were yesterday, how we traversed street after street; how the water stood in dark pools on the pavement; how we crossed a bridge where the rain was misting down upon the river; and how we by and by entered a well-known road, and drew up before that solitary house which was once more to be my home. There were the elm-trees, dark and gaunt as ever, and there was the mournful ivy mantling half the basement. There, too, as we stopped before the gate, was dear old Goody, shading the light with her hand, and

peering out at the first sound of our wheels!

Scrambling down as best I could while my father was settling with the driver, I threw myself into her arms.

"My lamb, my darling!" she cried, brokenly, and covered my face with tears and kisses.

While I was yet clinging to her and she to me, my father came in. He glanced angrily at us both, and bit his lip.

"Stop that noise, Beever, and put the child to bed," said he, harshly: and so brushed past, and went to his room.

But Goody, instead of doing any such thing, took me down to the kitchen, where there was a cheerful fire blazing in the grate, and a little table spread for supper. Here she chafed my cold hands, and my still colder feet—took off my cloak and bonnet—and, though weeping abundantly herself, entreated me not to cry.

"For it's no use taking on, my deary!" said she. "It's a weary world, and troubles come to the young as well as the old; but what's God's will is surely for the best. It's hard always to believe that, darling; but it's no use taking on. Try to eat a little bit of chicken, my lamb—come, you're warmer now!"

Though very faint indeed, I was not hungry, and had to be persuaded and petted a great deal

before I could make up my mind to taste anything. Having once begun, however, I felt better; and then Goody brought out a bottle with some brandy in it, and gave me a little warm brandy and water, which refreshed and strengthened me greatly. This done, I went and sat on her lap as I used to do in the old time before I went away, and laid my head down on her shoulder. Much to my surprise, Goody once again broke out into a passion of sobs, clasped me to her bosom, and began rocking me to and fro, to and fro, like one in deep distress.

"Don't cry so, Goody," I whispered, putting my arms about her neck. "Pray don't cry so!"

"I can't help it, my deary—I can't help it, when it comes across me," she moaned. "And you'll miss her so! You'll miss her!"

"I shall miss her every day of my life," said I, struggling hard now to keep down my own tears. "She was so kind to me, Goody; and I loved her so dearly!"

"Nay, she was not always so kind to you as she might have been; but she meant no harm by it, and you're a dear lamb to remember her kindly," sobbed Goody. "But it's been sudden—too sudden, my deary, for me to know how to bear it yet!"

"I never knew a word of it till yesterday morning," cried I, fairly breaking down. "Not a word, and—and I was so happy, and . . . ."

"Yesterday morning?" repeated Goody. "Why, it never happened till close upon eleven last night!"

Struck by a quick conviction that she was lamenting another grief than mine, I lifted my head from her shoulder, and looked her in the face.

"Oh, Goody," I faltered, "what do you mean? Is anything the matter?"

She turned a startled face upon me.

"What," said she, breathlessly, "don't you know? Didn't he—didn't the master tell you, as you came along?"

"Nothing—he told me nothing!"

"Jessie—your sister—your poor, dear, sister Jessie . . . ."

"Oh, Goody, what of her?"

"Dead, my dear!—dead and gone!—dead since this time last night!"

And she wrung her hands, and lifted up her voice, and lamented again as a mother might lament for her child!

Chilled and horror-stricken, I looked at her, and could neither weep nor speak.

"She was well in the morning," continued Goody, "well, and gay, and pretty as ever! She only suffered a few hours. It was soon over, and she died in my arms—in my arms, the child that I had nursed at her birth, and loved . . . . oh! I never knew how I loved her till now! God help us all, deary! God help and spare us!"

"What did she die of, Goody?" I whispered, shudderingly.

"Cholera—cholera, my darling!"

I had never heard the word before—I could not tell what it meant—I only knew that my sister Jessie was dead. Dead! I repeated the word vaguely over and over again, and could not bring myself to realise its meaning. I felt as if a heavy hand were laid upon my heart. My eyes burned, and my tongue was dry. I wondered why I could not weep like Goody. A thousand things flashed through my mind—things of long ago; words that she had spoken; gestures, trifles, traits forgotten till this moment. Poor Jessie!—dead.

"And papa?" I faltered.

"He was out," said Goody, wiping her eyes with her apron, and speaking somewhat bitterly. "He went out early, to dine at Richmond and spend the day in the country. I had no one to send after him, and could not tell where he was to be found. When he came home at night, little Jessie was gone. He was sadly shocked at first; and walked about his room for a long time before he went to bed. This morning he asked to see her, and then he took Hilda on his knee, and kissed and cried over her .... Oh, if it had been Hilda ...."

She checked herself, and our eyes met. After this we sat for some time without speaking—I with

my cheek laid against hers, and she with her arms clasped lovingly about me. By and by, seeing the fire was almost out, she took me by the hand, and led me up to bed. We stopped at the door of a room on the first floor, two stories lower than the bedroom which used to be ours.

"Hilda is here," she whispered, with her finger to her lip. "I sat with her to-night till she fell asleep, and we must try not to wake her. She is worn out with sorrow, poor darling—they loved each other so dearly!"

I had not seen Hilda for a whole year. I had left home without even bidding her farewell, and I returned to find her as I had left her—sleeping. Except that her face wore an expression of suffering which I had never seen there before, she seemed but little changed. Her cheek was flushed and feverish, and the rich tresses of her hair lay in heavy masses over her neck and arms. Bending down more closely, I saw that her eyelashes were still wet, and her pillow stained with tears. All at once, she woke, looked at me fixedly, half-fearfully, and murmured—"Barbara!"

I hung over her with clasped hands—with streaming eyes—with I know not what prayerful longing in my voice.

"Oh, Hilda!" I cried, "love me, dear! Love me a little! we are both so lonely!"

A languid smile flitted across her lips. She opened her arms to me, and, clasping me convulsively round the neck, sobbed as if her heart would break.

That night, for the first time in our lives, we slept in the same bed, each with an arm about the other's neck.

CHAPTER XVI.

RESULTS.

"EARTH to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust"—mournful and eternal words which find an echo in all human hearts, and are borne to us, sighing, on every breath we breathe, from the cradle to the grave! As they had been spoken, years ago, over our lost mother, so were they spoken over our sister. I remember all the circumstances of the funeral with painful distinctness to this day—the mutes standing at the door; the heavy tread of the bearers on the stairs; the strange silence that fell upon the house when all were gone; the unclosing of the shutters in the afternoon, and the sickening glare of the sunset as it streamed once again into the rooms. The day after, things lapsed, somehow, back into their old track. My father went to his club; and Miss Whymper came, as usual, and took her seat at the top of the schoolroom table.

A week, a fortnight, a month went by; and I never once heard of, or from, my aunt. I was too deeply shocked at first by what had happened in my home to think much of my own troubles; but as time went on, and these impressions lost somewhat of their intensity, all the old bitterness came back. Sometimes I wondered if it could all be true; and, waking from my sleep in the still night-time, asked myself whether I had been dreaming? Then flashed the desolate conviction —then rose the burning tears—then, slipping softly from my bed in the dim starlight, I crept, breathlessly, to a certain drawer, and took from its hiding-place the silver ring. To steal back with it to my bed; to lie with it pressed against my lips; to place it on the finger where he placed it; take it off and kiss it twenty times, and fall asleep at last in the midst of murmuring his name, was all the solace I had left.

As for Hilda, she was herself too unhappy to give much heed to me. Gentler and more affectionate than of old, she yet cherished a grief that refused to be comforted. I soon found that, devote myself as I would, the one place must yet remain vacant in her life. Jessie had been her second self, her companion, confidante, sister, friend. She lamented her with a passionate intensity of which childhood alone is capable, and, so lamenting, lost

sleep, appetite, and strength. In certain imperious natures, sorrow wears the aspect of despair and consumes like a wasting fire. So it was with Hilda. She spent her nights in weeping, and her days in a hopeless apathy, from which no effort of ours availed to rouse her.

Thus brooding away the weary weeks, she grew daily thinner, paler, and more unlike her former self.

One afternoon, when Miss Whymper had gone away and we were alone in the schoolroom, my father suddenly came in, followed by a strange gentleman. I was putting away the books, and Hilda was lying on a couch beside the open window, pale and weary, and half-asleep. The gentleman went straight to the couch; drew a chair quite close beside her; and said, turning to my father—

"This, I presume, Mr. Churchill, is our young friend—our, ahem!—valetudinarian?"

To which my father replied, "Yes, Sir Andrew, the same;" and sat down likewise.

Sir Andrew was a bulky man, tall and stout, with a forest of grey hair, a knobby red nose, and a voice husky, oleaginous, mellowed by port and maturity, like a Stilton cheese. In the brief silence that followed, he brought out a heavy gold snuff-box, and, with much solemnity, partook of three pinches. Presently he laid his hand on Hilda's

little wrist, felt her pulse, and nodded to himself several times.

"Well, Sir Andrew?" said my father anxiously, "well?"

The physician drew a long breath through his teeth, and tapped the lid of the snuff-box with his knuckles.

"Well, Mr. Churchill," said he deliberately, "we are, ahem!—debilitated—considerably debilitated. We evince an absence of that *vis anima* which is so desirable in youth—our pulse is intermittent—our nerves are unstrung—we . . . in short, we are not absolutely ill; but—but we are by no means absolutely well."

"And the remedy, sir?" suggested my father, impatiently. "The remedy?"

"Tonics; port wine; change of air; amusement."

My father shrugged his shoulders, and clinked the money in his pockets.

"In point of fact," continued Sir Andrew, reflectively, "I should say . . . . that is, Mr. Churchill, if I may offer a suggestion?"

"Offer fifty—fifty, if you please, Sir Andrew," said my father.

"Well then, I should say that mineral baths—Kissengen, for instance, or Ems—would do more for our young friend than any course of medical treat-

ment whatever. It is the nervous system that wants bracing, Mr. Churchill—the ner-vous sys-tem."

Saying which, he closed the snuff-box with a click, glanced again at his watch, patted Hilda patronizingly on the head, and rose to take his leave.

"Mr. Churchill," said he, "I attend you."

Whereat my father ceremoniously ushered him from the room, and we heard his boots creak ponderously all the way downstairs.

The next morning, when we were summoned, as usual, to the schoolroom, a letter addressed to Miss Whymper was found lying on the table. I recognised my father's large armorial seal and careless superscription, and, smitten with an anguished recollection of how and when I had last seen a similar missive, could scarce restrain my tears. I watched her break the seal—I watched her as she read—I translated that almost imperceptible expression of surprise and disappointment, and the quick glance which reverted more than once to Hilda's downcast face.

"Hilda is to be sent away," thought I, sadly; as Miss Whymper put the letter in her pocket, and said, in the same words that she had used every morning for the last four years—

"Now, young ladies, if you please, we will resume our studies."

I had guessed the truth, though not all the truth;

as I discovered before the day was out. Miss Whymper was to be dismissed, and not only was Hilda to be sent away for change of air, but I was to be sent with her. Our destination was not yet decided upon; but that it would be somewhere abroad was certain. In the meantime my father had set inquiries afoot, and authorised Goody to make active preparations for our departure. Hilda received this news with indifference—I, with mingled pain and pleasure—Goody, with unspeakable despair.

"Was it not enough," said she, twenty times a day, "was it not enough to lose one of my darlings, and must I now be parted from the two that are left? Maybe I shall never live to see either of you again, and, sure, if you were my own flesh and blood, I couldn't love you more!"

In reply to which, I consoled her as well as I could, and promised never to forget her, though I should be a dozen years away.

Thus many days went by, and the routine of our life was interrupted by all kinds of novel cares and occupations. Our wardrobes, which were always scanty enough, had to be almost entirely renewed; and two young women were kept constantly at work in an upper room, making cloaks, dresses, and other necessaries, all of which had, every now and then, to be fitted, and made the

subject of discussion. Our studies, at the same time, were no longer enforced with their accustomed regularity, and, at the expiration of a week or so, Miss Whymper took her final leave. We were called down, I remember, to papa's room, to bid her good-bye. Although it was now midsummer and there was no fire, my father was standing, as usual, in the middle of the rug, with his back to the grate. Miss Whymper was consigning some three or four crisp bank-notes to the capacious recesses of a large red pocket-book.

"I have been careful, madam," said my father, with that air of magnificent politeness which he assumed at pleasure, "to keep a memorandum of the numbers of the notes. You will, therefore, apply to me, in case of accident."

Miss Whymper, with her head on one side, thanked Mr. Churchill for his "courteous consideration."

"And should anything occur to frustrate the success of those views which I at present entertain with regard to the education of my daughters," continued he, "I trust that I may again be so fortunate, madam, as to secure your invaluable co-operation."

Miss Whymper replied by a profound courtesy.

"At the close of a connection," said she, "which

I think I may, without undue temerity, characterise as unusually productive of satisfaction to all parties concerned .... may I say to *all* parties, Mr. Churchill?"

"Madam," replied my father, with a glance at his watch, "you may."

"And which," pursued Miss Whymper, all on one subdued note, and as if she were repeating every word by heart, "has afforded *me* from first to last such a degree of interest as I do not remember to have ever previously entertained throughout the course of a long educational experience—at the close, I beg to repeat, of so agreeable an intercourse, have I Mr. Churchill's permission to present my dear young friends with these trifling evidences of my regard?"

Saying which, she produced two very small books from the depths of her reticule; while my father, more grandly than ever, protested that she did us both infinite honour, and desired us to thank Miss Whymper for her kindness. Whereat Miss Whymper bestowed on Hilda a frosty kiss, and a copy of Joyce's "Scientific Dialogues;" on me a still frostier kiss, and Mrs. Marcet's "Conversations on Chemistry;" hoped that we might be industrious and happy, and that neither our morals nor our digestive organs might be injuriously affected by foreign influences; and so, being moved to an

unusual display of emotion, applied the corner of her pocket handkerchief to her left eye, and wiped away an imaginary tear. My father then rang the bell; accompanied her as far as the study-door; bowed his stateliest bow; wished her "a very good morning;" and so she followed Goody down the stairs, and we saw Miss Whymper no more.

Our fate was decided by a foreign letter which arrived the next morning. We were to be received in a large collegiate school at Zollenstrasse, and were to start in two days, so as to arrive at the beginning of the July term. Except that Zollenstrasse was somewhere in Germany, and that Germany, though it seemed near enough on the map, lay a long way off across the sea, I knew nothing further of our destination.

CHAPTER XVII.

BY LAND AND SEA.

My father went with us himself the morning of our departure, and put us on board the steamer by which we were to be conveyed from London to Rotterdam. The bridges, quays, and floating piers were all alive with traffic. The deck of the steamer swarmed with seamen, travellers, and porters. Having seen our luggage safely stowed, and ascertained the situation of our berths, my father handed us over to the care of the captain, who not only promised us his special protection during the voyage, but engaged, on landing, to consign us to the care of one Jonathan Bose, Esq., a merchant of Rotterdam with whom my father was acquainted, and to whom we carried a letter of introduction. Presently the bell rang, and warned those who were not passengers to leave the vessel.

My father took Hilda's hands in both of his, and, kissing her first on the forehead and then on the mouth, bade her get well, be happy, and profit by her instructors. To me he only said, "Good-bye, Barbara," touched my cheek coldly with his lips, turned away, and hastened on shore. Then the gangway was removed; the moorings were loosened; the steamer heaved slowly round; the quays and bystanders seemed to recede behind us; and away we went, past the Custom-house and the Tower, and the crowded masts, which clustered, like a forest of bare larches, down the midpath of the river.

The day was fine, and for some hours we enjoyed it intensely. The passengers were all kind to us. Some of the ladies gave us fruit and cakes; the gentlemen told us the names of the places that we passed; and the Captain, every now and then, came up and asked us if we meant to be hungry by dinner time. Towards noon, we passed the red lighthouse at the Nore, and stood out to sea. The steamer now began to roll; the seagulls darted to and fro; and we saw a shoal of porpoises tumbling on the waves, about half a mile ahead. With these sights we were more amused than ever; till presently we both turned ill and giddy, and were glad to be carried down to our little narrow beds. Of this part of the journey I remember only that

I lay with closed eyes, and felt more sick and miserable than I had ever felt before—that, in the midst of my suffering, I strove every now and then to say a consoling word to Hilda, which only made me feel worse—that the day seemed as long as ten, and was followed by a weary night, lit by a swinging lamp, and traversed by hideous dreams and semi-conscious wakings—that the morning dawned greyly, and that, by and by, somebody bade me try to get up, for we were in smooth water again. We then got up, looking both very pale, and ventured on deck to breathe the fresh air, and have a peep at Rotterdam.

The passengers were all claiming their luggage, and the boat was crowded with foreign porters who wore ear-rings and red caps, and gabbled a strange guttural language that I had never heard before. Close beside us lay the great quays bordered with trees and lofty houses; laden with bales of goods; and swarming with sailors of all nations. Beyond us stretched the broad river, crowded with merchant vessels; and all along the banks, as far as one could see, an endless perspective of warehouses, cranes, masts, and tapering steeples. The strangeness of this scene, and the confusion of tongues, made me so nervous, and filled me with such a desolate sense of exile, that when a little old gentleman presently came up with an account book

in his hand, and a pen behind his ear, and asked if we were not going to land with the rest, I could with difficulty frame an intelligible answer. He then looked at the address upon our boxes.

"Zollenstrasse!" he exclaimed. "Zollenstrasse am Main! Why, that is a long way from here, little travellers! Who is to take care of you across the country?"

I shook my head, and said I did not know.

"And what shall you do when you get there? Have you friends in the Duchy?"

Hilda tossed back her curls, and lifted her dark eyes to his face.

"We are going to College," she said, proudly.

"Poor children! Have you no parents, that you should be sent so far from home?"

"We have a papa," replied Hilda.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders compassionately.

"How strange!" he murmured. "Had my children lived, I could never have parted from them; and yet this man trusts his little girls . . . ."

"Papa is not a man," interrupted Hilda indignantly. "He is a gentleman."

The stranger, with a melancholy smile, sat down on one of the boxes, and took her unwilling hand in his.

"Just what I should have supposed, my dear," he replied. "What is your father's name?"

"Edmund Churchill, Esquire."

"Churchill!" he repeated. "Edmund Churchill!" and so, with a look of some surprise, took a book from his pocket, and began hastily turning over the leaves. Stopping presently, with his finger on one particular entry, he said—

"I know your father—at least, I know a Mr. Edmund Churchill, of London."

"Then perhaps you know Mr. Jonathan Bose?" I interposed eagerly.

"I believe I do. What of him?"

"Only that we are to give him this letter; and the Captain has promised to take us to his house by-and-by."

Our new friend put out his hand for the letter, and broke the seal.

"The Captain may spare himself that trouble," he said. "I am Jonathan Bose."

Before we had well recovered the surprise of this encounter, he had glanced rapidly through the contents of the missive, thrust it into his pocket, and darted off in search of the Captain.

A huge porter then shouldered our boxes; and Mr. Jonathan Bose, who was quite breathless with excitement, gave a hand to each, and hurried us along the quays. He was delighted to have charge of us, and said so repeatedly as we went along; interspersing his conversation, at the same time,

with scraps of information respecting himself, his household, and the places we were passing on the way.

"This river," said he, "is the Maas—my house lies yonder, just beside that large India vessel which you see unlading farther on. This building belongs to the East India Company. I wish you could stay with me for a week, my dears, that I might show you all the sights of Rotterdam; but your father desires me to see you off again to-morrow morning. Well, well, this afternoon, at least, we can take a walk and see something of the city. I'll be sworn you never saw so many bridges in one place before, did you? How pleased Gretchen will be! Gretchen is my housekeeper; and the best creature in the world. You will not understand a word she says; but you will be capital friends, nevertheless. This walk along the quays is called the *Boompjes;* which means '*the little trees.*' They may have been little when they first got that name; but they are very big trees now, anyhow."

Chatting thus, he went on to say that, though a Dutchman by birth, he was English by education; that he had been for many years a widower, and had lost two little daughters whom he dearly loved; that he delighted in the society of the young; and that the pleasure with which he received us was

only diminished by the knowledge that we must leave so soon.

Being now arrived in front of a large house with a great deal of wood carving about the doors and windows, Mr. Bose ushered us into a little dark office, with rows of ledgers all round the walls, and a desk beside the window. He rang the bell, and a fat old woman, with a mob cap, and a plate of gilt metal on her forehead, came bustling in; embraced us rapturously, and took us upstairs to breakfast. The breakfast was laid in a quaint panelled room with a polished floor, upon which we were not allowed to walk till we had exchanged our dusty shoes for some huge list slippers which lay outside the door. After breakfast, Mr. Bose took us for a walk; and a most perplexing walk it was, through labyrinths of streets, over scores of drawbridges, and beside innumerable canals; all of which were alike shaded by trees, crowded with vessels, and swarming with sailors. In the afternoon we came back, very tired and hungry; and at dinner had thin soup, and sour cabbages, and jam with our meat, none of which we liked at all, though we were too polite to say so. After dinner, our host went out again, and Gretchen was left to entertain us till evening; when we had tea and chatted by twilight, while Mr. Bose smoked his pipe, and drank Schiedam and Seltzer water.

I cannot recall the substance of our conversation, for I was tired and dreamy, and he spoke more to Hilda than to me; but I remember how I sat looking at him by the fading light, reading every line and lineament of his face, and photographing his portrait on my memory. I see him now—a little spare figure, with scant grey locks, and an eye blue, benevolent, and bright as day. "A man of God's making," with goodness and sorrow written legibly on his brow. When we wished him good night, he kissed us both and bade us sleep well, for we must rise with the sun to resume our journey. And we did sleep well, sinking deeply down between the fragrant sheets, and lulled by the murmuring sounds that rose from quay and river.

With the first blush of early morning came Gretchen to wake us, and long before the people of Rotterdam were stirring we had bidden adieu to the stout old hand-maiden and the quaint house on the Boompjes, and were shivering on board a steamer which was to convey us to Mayence.

"I only wish I could spare time to go with you, my children," said Mr. Bose, as the last passengers came hurrying on deck. "However you will be taken good care of all the way. I have paid for everything in advance, and the steward of this boat engages to see you off by the diligence when your

water journey is ended. In the meantime, I will write to your father. God bless you both, and good-bye. I must go now, or they will carry me down the river before I know where I am!"

He then kissed us many times, gave me a paper which secured our places as far as the steamer could take us; and so, with glistening eyes, bade us a last farewell, and went away.

What with Hilda's continued weakness and fretfulness, the discomfort of living daily amongst strangers, and the exceeding dulness of the scenery, the journey was dreary enough. The travellers were mostly Dutch, and took but little notice of us; and, for the first two days at least, our journey lay between poplar-bordered dykes and dreary flats, with now and then a windmill to break the dull monotony of land and sky. That this river could be the Rhine, the beautiful, romantic, castled Rhine of which I had read so much, and of which Hugh Farquhar had told me so many tales and legends, seemed impossible.

On the third day, I began to believe it. Past Cologne the scenery became beautiful, and for the first time I beheld mountains, vineyards, and ivied ruins. Then a number of French and English tourists, and a band of itinerant musicians arrived on board; and, as it was very warm and fine, the tables were laid on deck, and we dined in the open

air. All this was novel and exhilarating, and the hours flew so quickly that the summer dusk came on only too soon, and we landed, quite unwillingly, at Coblentz for the night.

The perpetual travelling, however, now began to tell upon us, and although the weather was even brighter, and the course of the river more lovely than ever, we were so wearied when the fourth day came that we could not half enjoy the wonders of the journey. Landing late in the afternoon opposite Mayence, we found that the diligence had started hours ago; so the steward took us to a quiet inn close by, where we supped at a long table with a number of other people, and slept in a bed-room overlooking the river.

The next morning we were on the road betimes, occupying two opposite corners in a huge unwieldy diligence full of bearded travellers, none of whom spoke a word of English. About midday we alighted at a dirty inn in a dirty village, and dined miserably. Then on again for hours and hours, past woods, and mountains, and picturesque hamlets lying low in green valleys, where sometimes the road ran for miles together beside the eager and beautiful Main river. Towards evening we stopped at a little wayside building with a flag before the door, where our passports and luggage were examined by three or four soldiers in faded

uniforms of blue and silver. About half an hour after this, we turned the shoulder of a hill and came suddenly in sight of a pretty town with steeples and towers, and white houses, and a quaint old bridge of boats. It was just dusk—dusk enough to show the lighted oriel in the Cathedral, and yet not so dusk as to veil the outlines of the hills, or the gleaming of the river. The road wound downwards to the town, bordered on either side by a double avenue of gigantic poplars. At the foot of this avenue stood a great hotel, before the door of which the diligence drew up. Then a waiter came running out; the conductor flung our boxes on the pavement; the passengers gesticulated; and from half-a-dozen mouths together I heard the welcome name of "Zollenstrasse—Zollenstrasse-am-Main!"

We had no sooner alighted than the diligence rolled rapidly away, and left us standing face to face with the bowing waiter, who smiled, nodded, examined the address upon our luggage, darted back into the hotel, and presently returned with a man in a blue and silver livery, who put our boxes on a truck, and led the way. We followed him down a narrow side-road bordered with trees, and stopped before a huge wooden gate with two enormous knockers, and a lamp overhead. This gate was opened by a porter in the same livery, who

preceded us across the courtyard, up a lofty flight of steps, and into a large parlour, where an elderly lady and eight young girls were sitting at needlework. The lady rose, extended a hand to each, and kissed us both upon the forehead.

"Welcome," said she, in good English, "welcome, my dear children, to your new home. Try to like it and to be happy with us, and we shall all love you."

She then made a sign to the rest, who immediately surrounded us. Some shook hands with us; some kissed us on the cheeks; some disembarrassed us of our cloaks and bonnets; and all had a kind word or two of broken English to bid us welcome —all, except one shy little dark maiden, who whispered "willkommen," in my ear, and then, blushing and laughing, ran away.

"Your names, I think," said the lady, referring to a letter which she took from the pocket of her apron, "are Barbara and Hilda Churchill. Now you must tell me which is Barbara, and which Hilda, that I may know how to call you."

"I am Hilda," said my sister, "and I am called Miss Churchill, because I am the eldest."

The lady smiled gravely.

"We have no Misses here," said she, "and no distinctions of age. Your companions call each other by their baptismal names, and it is our rule

to recognise no superiority but that of merit. As for myself, I am the superintendent of this Academy, and you will call me Madame Brenner. But I daresay you are tired and hungry after your day's journey. Annchen, see if supper be ready."

Annchen curtsied and left the room, while Madame Brenner resumed her seat, and continued to address us.

"At present," said she, "our numbers are few; for the half-yearly term only commenced yesterday, and our students rarely assemble under a week. However we shall have more arrivals to-morrow; and by Sunday our society, I daresay, will be complete. But here comes Annchen, telling us that supper is ready."

So saying she took me by the hand, left Hilda to follow with Annchen and the rest, and led the way into an adjoining room where there was a long table laid for supper. The meal was plain, but abundant, and consisted of soup, eggs, rice-puddings, coffee, cream-cheese, brown bread, and salad. This over, we returned to the parlour, and one of the scholars read prayers aloud in German. When we rose from our knees, each scholar went up to Madame Brenner in turn and bade her good night; but when we followed their example, she shook her head, and said—

"To-night I will go with you, and show you where you are to sleep."

We followed her through a long corridor with a row of doors on one side and windows on the other.

"This," said Madame Brenner, "is one of our four dormitories. It contains six rooms, and in each room six students sleep. Every door is numbered, and your door is number five. Annchen and Luisa are at present your only companions; but as soon as the rest arrive, each bed will have its occupant. Do you like your room?"

It was a pretty, conventual, white-washed chamber, containing six little beds with white hangings, six rush-bottomed chairs, three large deal presses, and no carpet. It looked cheerful and airy, notwithstanding its simplicity, and we both liked it at a glance.

Madame Brenner then bade us good night, and our companions assisted us to open our trunks, showed us in which press to keep our clothes, helped us to undress, and made as much of us as if we had been long expected guests.

"You shall have my bed, Barbara, if you like it best," said Annchen. "It is next the window, and overlooks the garden."

"In that case," cried Luisa, "I shall sleep next to Hilda, and that will be delightful! Hilda and I must be great friends. I am so fond of the English! There was an English girl here last

year, and we were the fastest friends in the world. She gave me this locket with her hair in it; but she only wrote to me once after she left, and I fear she has forgotten me. And so you have come all this way, and have crossed the sea! Ah, how I should like to travel! I have never seen the sea. I come from Mulhouse, which is only a day's journey; and yet that is the longest distance I have ever travelled."

"You speak English very well," I observed, sleepily.

"Speak English! I should think so, indeed! You will not be surprised at it when you have been here a few days, and have seen what our English classes are. Such tasks as we have to learn! Such themes, and dictations, and tiresome rules! *Mein Gott!* we are martyrs to English, and are never allowed to speak German except in the hours of recreation! And there is Madame Thompson, our English *gouvernante!* . . . Oh, Annchen, how Hilda and Barbara will be amused with Madame Thompson!"

"Madame Thompson is very good-natured," said Annchen, quietly.

"And then there is Monsieur Duvernoy, our French tutor, and we have two French governesses besides; and such lots of other professors for music, drawing, Italian, natural philosophy, elocu-

tion, and Heaven knows what beside! Have you been to school before? No! Ah, then, you have no idea of what hard work it is; and this is not a school, you know, but a College."

"What is the difference?" asked Hilda, sitting up in bed, and looking considerably dismayed at the prospect disclosed by her talkative neighbour.

"The difference? Oh, the difference is enormous! In the first place, this is a government establishment, founded and endowed; and there are upwards of seventy students, thirty of whom pay nothing, but are taught for charity, and elected every five years. Then we have examinations twice a year; and when we leave College we take home a certificate signed by the Grand Duke himself. And we learn in terms; and we call our holidays vacations; and our dining-room a refectory; and our teachers are never masters or governesses, but always professors. Oh, a College is a very grand place, I assure you, compared with a school; but one has to work like a slave for the honour of being brought up in it!"

"I think I would rather have been sent to school, though," said Hilda, dolefully.

Of this observation, however, Luisa took no notice; but kept running on long after Annchen had put out the light, and I had grown too sleepy to listen.

"Silver medal—half-holiday—breakfast—milk and water—Madame Brenner—counterpoint—perspective" .....

These were the last words I heard, sinking, sinking away into the ocean of dreams.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ZOLLENSTRASSE-AM-MAIN.

It is not my intention to dwell at any considerable length upon the first years of my College life. I have already lingered too long and too fondly over these early reminiscences, and I must now content myself with an outline of that pleasant interval which links childhood to youth, and youth to womanhood—which stores the mind with knowledge, and the heart with all good impulses—which touches already on the confines of Romance, and yet leaves the poem of life unwritten and untold. It will bear to be related rapidly. The sketch of a month, a week, a day, would suffice to paint the pleasant monotony of years which so nearly resembled each other. Be this chapter devoted, then, to an "abstract and brief chronicle" of our occupations and way of life abroad; and also of the do-

minions, the capital, and the Collegiate academy in which it had pleased fate and my father to establish us.

Situated in the very heart of Central Germany, traversed by a broad and beautiful river, and celebrated alike for its scenery and its mineral waters, the Grand Duchy of Zollenstrasse-am-Main occupies but a very small space upon the map, and only half a page of Murray's Continental Handbook. The truth is that the whole territory covers an area of only eighty square miles; that the population numbers somewhat less than eleven thousand souls; that the capital consists of a square and two streets, chiefly hotels and lodging-houses; and that but for the influx of visitors every summer and autumn, the inhabitants would long ago have died of inanition and become an extinct species. Under these circumstances, the court of Zollenstrasse can hardly be expected to exercise much influence upon the affairs of Europe, or, even in its matrimonial alliances, materially to affect the balance of power. And yet the Grand Duchy is a real Grand Duchy; and the Grand Duke is a real Grand Duke; and the comfortable white house in which he lives is called The Palace; and the two little soldiers who walk up and down before the door all day long are privates in that shabby regiment of which His Serene Highness is so proud,

and which the townspeople, with pardonable patriotism, style the Military Establishment of the State. Besides this, the Duchy has its national coinage, stamped with a profile of LEOPOLD XVIII., DUX ZOLL: on one side, and the Ducal arms on the other; and its national costume, which is horribly unbecoming; and its national dialect, upon which the Zollenstrassers pique themselves more than enough, to the infinite amusement of their neighbours.

Zollenstrasse, the capital, consists, as I have already observed, chiefly of lodging-houses, the largest of which, however, belongs to no less a landlord than His Serene Highness himself. It was formerly one of the royal residences; but is now let out in suites, and is by far the most reasonable and best appointed establishment in the town. The fact is humiliating; but the Duke is poor and the speculation profitable. The other principal buildings are the Pumproom, Bath-house, Conversation Haus, Palace, Theatre, and Collegiate Academy. The Pumproom, or Trinkhalle, is an open colonnade painted gaudily in fresco, and provided with a chalybeate tap at either end. The Brunnen Mädchen are pretty and obliging. The waters taste like hot ink and lucifer matches. The Conversation Haus is a superb building, containing news-rooms, gaming-rooms, and a large

hall which serves for balls and concerts. It was built by the present Duke, and is by him let to a company of French speculators at a round rental of sixty thousand dollars per annum. All things considered, His Serene Highness is not, perhaps, quite so needy as one might suppose. He has many little perquisites, besides those already enumerated. He taxes the hotel-keepers, the visitors, and the itinerant dealers in stag's-horn brooches and Swiss carvings. He levies an impost upon pleasure-boats, omnibuses, and donkeys. He regulates the tariff for ices, coffee, and Strasbourg beer. He claims a per-centage on the sale of guide-books and newspapers; and exacts a dividend out of the visitors' washing-bills. Then all the flys and saddle-horses belong to him; and the theatre is his property; and the Bath-house was his father's private speculation; so that, concisely to sum up the sources of the Grand Ducal revenue, His Serene Highness is lodging-house keeper, theatrical manager, job-master, bath-owner, landlord of gambling-houses, and general tax-collector to the state. You would never think this, to look at him. At least, you would not have thought it had you looked at him so nearly and so often as I did, and seen what a fine, handsome, polite gentleman he was, with a ribbon in his button-hole, and a cream-coloured moustache that hung over his

mouth like a fringe of spun silk. He used to ride and drive about quite unattended, and walk in the public gardens after dinner with his two little boys, like a mere ordinary mortal. And many a time, when the French company came down and Madame Brenner took a select detachment of her scholars to the theatre to witness a piece of Racine or Molière, I have seen his august Highness applauding with his own royal hands; or, like an affable potentate as he was, leaning back in his seat, and laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks. The theatre, I should observe, was always over at nine; and the ladies in the boxes wore their bonnets, and took their knitting with them.

Then the Grand Duke was an amateur composer, and wrote classical cantatas which were performed by the pupils of our academy; and he played the violin, it was said, to admiration; and he turned the most exquisite little boxes in ivory for all his royal nieces and cousins, down to those of Saxe-Hohenhausen in the fortieth degree; and he painted in oils; and he wrote poetry; and at his chateau of Schwartzberg, a romantic old hunting-lodge about two miles from the capital, he kept a preserve of tame wild boars, for the express purpose of getting up boar-hunts by torchlight, for the amusement of those distinguished visitors who came to stay with him in the season. So his tastes,

you see, were in the highest degree refined, and one was only surprised to think how little they interfered with his duties as a sovereign and a tradesman.

His duties as a sovereign, however, were not onerous; but consisted chiefly of a due supervision of the perquisites before-mentioned, and the expenditure of the same. He held a privy-council every morning after breakfast, and a levee once a month. He reviewed the Military Establishment of the State every two or three days; and, as President of our Academy, honoured the Examinations with his presence at the close of each term. On court-days a flag was hoisted at the palace; the sentries were doubled; and the band played for an extra hour in the public garden. I remember now, as well as possible, how we school-girls were amused to see the ladies picking their way across the square in their court-dresses, with their maid-servants and umbrellas—how we used to make bets beforehand as to who would walk, and who would hire a fly, and how many families would borrow the Gräfin von Steinmetz's old yellow landau—how daring our remarks were when Herr Secretary Ungar went by, because he was stone-deaf, and could not hear a word we said—and what fun we made of General Schinkel's pigtail, and the Town-Councillors' legs.

It at first surprised me to learn how strictly these little courts were confined to the nobles and dignitaries of Zollenstrasse proper, and how rigidly the etiquette was kept up with regard to strangers. No foreigner could be presented unless he brought proof that he had been presented at home; and not even a German baron from a neighbouring state was received without first submitting his credentials to a privy-councillor. I own that I laughed at this for a long time, and thought it preposterous that an English commoner whose income numbered thousands when that of His Highness numbered tens, and whose house and gardens were probably as large as all the houses and gardens in the Duchy of Zollenstrasse put together, should be excluded from the honours of a Ducal levée simply because he had never kissed hands at St. James's; but as I grew older I discovered the wisdom of this arrangement, and found that, after all, the precautions of the Zollenstrassers were not quite misplaced. The fact was that our annual visitors were of a very miscellaneous description. They came and went like the swallows; with this difference, that, instead of seeking a warmer clime, they frequently came from one which was already too hot to hold them. How was one to know who they were, whence they came, or whither they were going? How guess the antecedents of those elegant ladies

who drank the waters in the morning; ate ices all day long in the public garden; and staked their five-franc pieces at the roulette-tables every evening? That French exquisite who calls himself a marquis and wears a diamond as large as a three-penny piece, is, perhaps, a convicted forger, with T.F. branded on his shoulder. That gallant English tourist with the military frock, may be a blackleg. That wealthy capitalist who has hired the best *suite* at the best hotel, a fraudulent bankrupt. To speak truth, a gaming spa offers many inducements to the equivocal of both sexes; and though his Serene Highness, Leopold XVIII., did condescend to provide the tables, furnish the lodgings, and accept the profits, he had no resource but to turn his august back upon those visitors by whom he lived.

But it is time that I said something of our own way of life, and of the establishment whereof we were members.

Excepting only the Conversation Haus, our Collegiate Academy was the handsomest building in the little capital of Zollenstrasse-am-Main. The house was large and imposing; and, with its long wings, occupied three sides of a spacious courtyard. It contained a concert-room, a library, eight class-rooms, two large dining-halls, apartments for the resident professors, dormitories for sixty scholars, a board room, and extensive offices. At the back

of the Academy lay an extensive kitchen-garden; and to the left of the garden, a playground and gymnasium. The number of residents, exclusive of teachers and servants, was limited to sixty; thirty of whom were boys, and thirty girls. Fifteen of each sex were admitted on the foundation. Out-pupils were also received to the number of sixty more; but these attended daily, made their payments half-yearly, and were neither permitted to dine at our tables, nor join us in our hours of recreation. A comfortable waiting-room was placed, however, at their disposal, where they could read, work, or practise; and those who came from a distance were allowed to have refreshments sent in from a Gasthof in the Theater-platz. The interior arrangements of the Academy were perfect. The male and female pupils were kept as thoroughly apart as if they had not been resident under the one roof. We had our separate class-rooms, dining-rooms, and occupations; and, save at the half-yearly *fêtes*, the concerts, the examinations, or the chapel on Sundays, never exchanged so much as a glance. For the maintenence of order and discipline we were also well provided. A matron attended to the housekeeping, and Madame Brenner had the supervision of all matters connected with the education and comfort of the female students. A president and master-librarian exercised

supreme authority over the boys. The commissariat was liberal; a medical officer resided in the house; and six women-servants and two men were kept, besides the porter at the gate. These, with four resident professors, constituted the whole staff, and a highly efficient staff it was.

As for the education afforded by this institution, I cannot better explain its aim and nature than by stating at once that it was essentially a school of art, devoted to the cultivation of native talent and regulated upon principles which subordinated all minor considerations to this one great object. Thus the free scholars were all brought up to the pursuit of either music, sculpture, or painting; and even those students whose means enabled them to dispense with a profession, were compelled, in like manner, to conform to the academic rules, and select some leading study. The head masters of each department resided in the house, and the rest of the teachers attended daily. Every year six advanced students of each sex were elected as monitors, whereupon it became their duty to overlook the studies of the rest; and, though none but Germans were admitted to the privileges of the gratuitous education, foreigners who were willing to pay for their instruction were not excluded. There were limitations, however, to both of these laws. No German who was a

subject of either Austria or Prussia could, under any circumstances, be eligible as a free scholar; and this because Austria and Prussia were judged sufficiently rich and powerful to cultivate the fine arts for themselves. Neither could any foreign applicant be received on paying terms, so long as there were native applicants of equal merit in the field.

This being the case, it was quite a rare and fortunate chance that Hilda and I should have succeeded so easily.

I have already said that the Grand Duke was our patron and perpetual president; but we also had honorary members and subscribers among most of the crowned heads and nobles of the German Confederation. We held yearly exhibitions, and concerts during the season; and besides the ordinary examinations at the close of every term, we had a grand triennial Competition, to which art-professors and amateurs from every quarter were invited. A committee of judgment was then formed; medals were distributed; and to those pupils whose term of study had expired, certificates of merit were delivered. Taken as a whole, I doubt if there be in all Europe an educational institute so methodically conducted, and so thoroughly repaying in its results as this Collegiate Academy which lies *perdu* in the heart of a remote

German state, scarcely known even by name beyond the confines of the Rhine and Elbe; but destined some day to be famed in the fame of its disciples. May all prosperity and all honour be with it; and may other nations take example by it! Methinks there are one or two institutions in my native country, and, perhaps, one or two more in the gayest of neighbouring capitals, which might with advantage be remodelled on the principles of our Zollenstrasse School of Art.

It was not long before I fell in with the prescribed routine, and became thoroughly at home and happy in my student-life. I liked my teachers, my friendly school companions, and the pleasant regularity of hours and occupations. Naturally eager for knowledge, I derived inexpressible satisfaction from the consciousness of daily improvement. To wake in the morning with all the day before me, and to know that every hour of that day was laid out beforehand for my benefit—to earn a smile from Madame Brenner, or a word of praise from Professor Metz—to work hard, while work was the order of the hour—to play heartily, when the interval of relaxation came—to steal by twilight into some quiet corner, and read till it was too dark to do aught but sit and muse with folded hands—to sup merrily off such pastoral fare as milk, and fruit, and fresh brown bread; and after-

wards to go to bed, tired, and happy, and at peace with myself and all the world beside—this was indeed a life such as I had never known before; such as I have never known since; such as none of us can know, save in our happy school-days.

Then the college was like a home, in the true meaning of that dear old Saxon word; and we house-students were to each other, for the most part, as the members of a single family. I had many friends, for we were all friends, and two or three special intimates. Amongst these latter were Annchen, and the dark-haired Luisa, and a tender-hearted impulsive Bavarian, called Ida Saxe, with a heart full of enthusiasm, and a head full of legends. I became much attached to her; and when Annchen and Luisa, who were both older than myself, had left the school, our affection grew even more exclusive than before. Our tastes, ages, studies, and ambitions were the same. We had each chosen painting for our principal pursuit—we studied under the same master—we drew from the same models—we worked in the same class, and we occupied the same bedroom. She was an orphan, and looked forward to art as her profession. I also cherished visions of ambition, and hoped that the time might come when my father would suffer me to turn my studies to their just account. For I had talent, and my talent was of the right sort—

inborn, earnest, persevering, confident to strive, humble to learn, patient in defeat, and unsatisfied in success. Term after term, I won the approbation of my teachers, and felt the power growing stronger and clearer within me. By and by I carried off the third-class medal for the best drawing from the antique; and, at the close of my third year, the second silver medal for an original composition. To achieve the first silver medal, or even, at some far-off day, to become the victorious winner of the first-class certificate and the grand gold medal of the Triennial Competition, were glories that I could scarcely hope to compass; but which, though I hardly dared confess it to myself, had become the great aims of my life.

As for Hilda, she had no such ambition. Finding herself, according to the school regulations, obliged to make choice of some especial art, she took up that of music, in which she was already a tolerable proficient. I do not think she really loved music, or selected it out of preference; but because she disliked work, and believed that in this science she would find less to learn. She was mistaken, however; for music as it is taught in Germany, and music as it was taught by Miss Whymper, were two very different affairs. In the first place, she had to unlearn much of her previous knowledge, which is never easy; in the second

place, she had to study counterpoint; and in the third place, she was forced to practise for a certain number of hours *per diem*. As for the light modern school to which she had hitherto been accustomed, it availed her nothing. Instead of Fantasias and Airs with amazing variations, she was condemned to the Sonatas of Beethoven and Mozart, and the fugues of Sebastian Bach. Cast adrift, thus, upon an academy where an arrangement of operatic airs by Hertz was looked upon with pious horror, my unlucky sister had but a hard time of it, and, for the first half year or so, made herself consistently wretched and disagreeable. The truth is that Hilda was not amiable. She was handsome, haughty, and ready-witted; and she possessed a remarkable facility in the acquirement of accomplishments. Up to a certain point, and for just so long as her curiosity held out, she succeeded rapidly; but she had no real industry; and as soon as she ceased to be amused, grew careless, impatient, and out of heart. With such a disposition, it is difficult to go creditably through any academic education; and indeed I hardly know how or where it would have ended, had not Professor Oberstein one day discovered that Hilda had a voice—a voice so pure, so extensive, so sweet and flexible, as had seldom before been heard within the walls of the college. From this time forth

Hilda was content; and the masters had comparatively little trouble to make her work. To sing was easier than to play fugues, and study Albrechtsberger. Besides her vanity was touched. She longed for the time when she could take part in the academy concerts; and she found that when singing she looked even handsomer than when silent. Her progress soon surprised us; and though she continued to be but a moderate pianist and a very indifferent theorist, she improved so rapidly in her new study, that after about eighteen months of Professor Oberstein's tuition, she was competent to sing in a concerted piece at one of our *matinées musicales*. From concerted pieces she was promoted to solos; and though I am not certain that she continued always to advance at the same rate, she at least kept up her reputation in the vocal classes, and from time to time received, not only the applause of an audience, but the more solid testimonial of a second or third class examination medal. I do not suppose, however, that Hilda was ever so thoroughly happy in her school-life as I was in mine. Naturally proud and reserved, she made no intimacies, and was altogether less popular than myself. She never took me into her heart, as I had once hoped. We were good friends, but not much more; and our sojourn at Zollenstrasse drew us less together than one

could have anticipated. She had but liitle sympathy with my pursuits, and none with my ambitions. That I, a Churchill, should dream of following my art as a profession, shocked all her prejudices; whilst I, on the other hand, entertained a profound indifference towards all those fashionable and matrimonial visions to which her present studies were by her regarded as mere adjuncts and preliminaries. And thus, alas! it was and must ever be. My sister was not to be my second self, pray for it, or strive for it, as I would!

So the years went on, and, being so far from home, we spent vacation-time as well as term-time at the college. We wrote to our father about once in every three months—he replied to us about twice in every eight or ten. His letters were always the same—so much the same that he might as well have had them lithographed. He was happy to hear that we were so well satisfied with our place of residence, and that we gave so much satisfaction to our teachers; he rejoiced to say that he was well, and that Beever was the same as ever; and he remained our affectionate father, &c. &c. This was the purport of his letters, one and all—not a word more, and not a word less.

For my part, I had ceased to care for home or England now. I felt that there was but one home in the old country that could ever be home to me

—and into that I had no hope of ever entering again. To stay abroad, then, for ever; to work out my life in the land of Kaulbach, Overbeck, and Lessing; to visit Rome and the Vatican some time before I died; and to end my days within the walls of that Academy of which I was a loving and reverent disciple, constituted all the substance of my prayers—"the *ultima Thule* of my wandering desires."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNEXPECTED EVENT.

"HAS anything been heard about the excursion?"

"Yes, we are to go to-day, if Madame Brenner and the afternoon continue favourable."

"Oh, delightful! I declare I had almost feared that our country afternoons were never to begin again."

"That is because a whole winter has gone by since we took our last trip; and that .... let me see—that must have been in October."

"And we are now in the middle of April! Well, never mind, the summer is coming again, and the time has not seemed so very slow, after all. Where do you think we shall go? To the Hermitage, or to the ruins of Königsberg?"

"Nay, that is more than I can tell; but I should say to the woods of Brühl. Professor Metz was

there the other day, and I heard him tell Madame Brenner that he had never seen such wild-flowers in his life . . . ."

"Hush! Here he comes. We must not be caught idling!"

And, as the door opened, the heads of the two speakers were bent busily over their easels. The Professor came in, tall, gaunt, and grey; stooping somewhat in the shoulders, as was his habit; and darting quick, searching glances all about the room. Not a whisper disturbed the profound silence of the crowded studio, and the buzzing of a fly against the skylight was distinctly audible. In and out, threading his way among the easels, the great master then made the round of the class. To some he gave a word of praise, to some a shake of the head, and some he passed by in silence. Pausing beside me for an instant, he uttered a short grunt of approbation; and the next moment bent over my unlucky neighbour, Emma Werner, took the brush from her hand, and at a single touch effaced the head upon which she had been toiling all the morning.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, "is it so bad as that?"

"Bad?" he repeated. "So bad that I have more hope for you than before. Signal failures imply genius. A fool would have done better."

And with this equivocal encouragement, and a

still more equivocal shrug of the shoulders, he passed on.

"That cherub," said he to one, "has the scarlet fever."

To another:—"Your Hagar looks like a female Ugolino. 'Tis a baker's conception of the subject."

To a third:—"This foreground labours under a green and yellow melancholy!"

To a fourth:—"Your Madonna is a coquette."

To a fifth:—"What is your subject—Bacchus and Ariadne? Humph! Which is Bacchus, and which Ariadne?"

At last, having finished his tour of inspection, he came back to where Ida and I were working side by side, and stood for some time between the two easels, silent and observant. We were copying a head of Christ by Guido, which the Grand Duke had lent for the advanced students.

"It is possible," said he, presently, "to copy too well. Try to think less of the painting, and more of the idea. Truth is not necessarily literal. The Divine never can be literal; and there is in all art a vanishing point where the real merges itself into the ideal. Have courage, and remember that to attempt much is to learn much. The horizon mounts with the eye of the climber."

Having said this, he strode to the door; bowed hurriedly; and was gone in a moment. We had

all risen in silence to return his salutation; but the door was no sooner closed behind him than a Babel of chatter broke out, and everybody was in motion. This afternoon visit concluded the day's work, and the Professor's exit gave the signal for breaking up the class. In an instant all was confusion, laughter, and bustle. Paintings were laid aside, easels shut up, brushes washed, palates cleaned, and copies put carefully away; while in the midst of it all came a message from Madame Brenner, desiring us to be ready to start at three o'clock upon an excursion to the woods of Brühl.

With what shouts and hand-clappings this information was received; how quickly the studio was put in order; what haste we made to dress; and with what delight we poured out of the courtyard and took the road to Brühl, none but those who have lived in schools and enjoyed half-holidays can conceive. Ida and I walked together, and Hilda, as usual, with the French governess, Mademoiselle Violette. Whether she chose her companion from preference, or whether, being one of the elder girls, she thought it more dignified to be seen walking with a teacher, I cannot tell—I only know that Mademoiselle Violette was a little elderly, frivolous, conceited Parisian, who talked of nothing but her high birth, her misfortunes, her lover who died abroad, and her everlasting *toilette*.

Having walked very soberly, two by two, all through the town and along the public road, we broke up the order of march as soon as we arrived at the low meadows, and became a very noisy company. Our way lay mostly beside the river. The trees were clad in their first pale feathery foliage; the afternoon was hot and sunny like an afternoon in July; and the swallows were darting hither and thither, as if they knew not how to rejoice enough in the returning summer.

The woods lay between two and three miles to the west of the town, and we reached them about half-past four o'clock. How pleasant to plunge into the shade, after walking for an hour and a half with the sun in our faces! How delicious to tread the elastic moss between the trees; to lie down upon banks literally mantled over with primroses, blue hyacinths, and the wild geranium; to watch the shafts of sunlight piercing the green gloom here and there, and gilding the smooth boles of the silver ash! Intoxicated with delight, we laughed, we ran, we pelted each other with wild flowers, and made the woods ring again with the echoes of our voices. By and by, being somewhat warm and weary, we strolled away by twos and threes, and found resting-places and green nooks to our fancy. An old felled trunk coated with grey moss, furnished Ida and me with a seat; and

there, at some little distance from the rest, we sat hand in hand, and talked, as only the young ever talk, of art, friendship, and the future.

"It was our old Frauenkirche in Munich that made me an artist," said Ida. "From the time when I was quite a little child, and my mother used to carry me in her arms to mass, I remember the bronze tomb of the Emperor Louis, and the painted windows behind the altar. I was never weary of gazing up at those gorgeous kings and saints. I remember, also, how the evening sun used to shine through, and stain the pavement of the side-aisles with flecks of purple and gold. I believe that my very soul thirsted for colour, and that my eyes drank it in as eagerly as ever wayfarer drank from the springs of the desert. I little thought at that time that I should ever come to handle it familiarly, and make it the medium of my own thoughts!"

"But you hoped to be a painter from the first?"

"No. My parents were humble folks, and chance alone determined my career."

"Chance! What chance, Ida?"

"I will tell you. My father kept a small fruit-garden on the left bank of the Isar, about three-quarters of a mile out of Munich on the Harlaching road. Our house stood by the way-side, and from the back we had a view of the Tyrolean Alps. We

were very poor. The produce of the garden barely sufficed to keep us, though the land and cottage were our own; and in the winter time we suffered many privations. Still my childhood passed very happily. I went to the Free-school every day, and to Mass every Sunday and Saint's-day; and each October, when the People's festival came round, my parents made holiday, and took me with them to see the prize fruits and flowers, and the rifle-shooting in the Theresa-fields. Thus the years went by, and at thirteen I was less ignorant than might have been supposed. About this time, having by dint of severe economy saved a score or so of dollars, my parents contrived to furnish and let our two best rooms. Our first lodger was a clerk from some banking-house in the town, who went in to business every morning, and remained away all day. However, he only stayed with us about three months, and was succeeded by an English artist, who had come to study in the galleries of Munich. This artist discovered, somehow, that I loved art; became interested in me; gave me a few lessons, and—and taught me, in short, to know my own destiny."

"Well?" said I, finding that she paused in her narrative.

"Well, it went on thus for a year or more, till one day my kind friend suggested that I should be-

come a candidate for one of the free scholarships of the Zollenstrasse School of Art, and himself offered to defray the expenses of election. I made the effort—I succeeded—I have been here, as you know, five years already, and I have two more years to remain."

"And the English artist—where is he? Do you ever hear from him? Have you seen him since you left Munich?"

Ida shook her head, and turned her face away.

"He went back, soon after, to his native country," she said, "and we have heard nothing of him from that day to this. But it is your turn now, Barbara. Tell me, when did you first recognise your vocation?"

"In my cradle, I think," I replied, with a smile and a sigh. "Before I could speak plainly, I scrawled with a pencil: and when I was quite a little girl I could see more faces in the clouds, and more pictures in the fire, than either of my sisters. I never studied, however, till I came here."

"And that," exclaimed Ida, "was at the very same term that I joined, six years ago?"

"Precisely."

"And you are one year younger than I?"

"Yes," I replied, "I am just seventeen, and you are eighteen. You have the advantage of me

in every way. You had a year's teaching before you came here."

"Bah! What is that? I have not half your genius!"

"Nay—if you talk thus we shall quarrel."

"For the first time, Barbara!" laughed Ida, putting her arms about my neck. "For the first time! Besides, you know, we have promised each other never to disagree—never to love each other less—never to let anything come between us, either in our friendship or our future!"

"Do you suppose, Ida, that I forget it?"

"And then," continued she, "we shall some day go to Rome together—Rome, the artist's Paradise! We shall lodge among the painters in the Via Margutta, and go to the artists' festival at Albano. We will hire a studio; paint together; study together; wander together in the ruins of the Forum, and under the moonlit arches of the Coliseum! Oh, Barbara, does it not make your heart beat to think of it?"

"Alas! dear, I am not so confident. Could I but believe it possible . . . ."

"To those who rely upon their own industry, all things are possible."

"A most sententious maxim; but how shall I apply it?"

"You shall apply it by . . . let me see, by paint-

ing a great historical picture, a masterpiece of modern art!"

"Oh, by all means!"

"And the Grand Duke must buy it . . . stay, he could not afford to buy it. It will be too expensive for him; and, besides, if he did buy it, where could he put it? No—no, King Louis of Bavaria must buy it! He will give you two or three thousand dollars for it, and it will be hung in the modern Pinacothek, in my own dear city of Munich, where all the world will see and do it justice."

"I desire nothing better. Pray go on."

"Well, with your three thousand dollars you can go to Rome, and *voilà*—the thing is done!"

"Would that it were, Ida!" I exclaimed, laughing. "Unfortunately, however, something more than self-reliance is necessary to carry out this admirable project. At present, yours is but a programme, with no entertainment to follow."

"That does not prove that the entertainment never will follow. Oh, I have set my heart on seeing you famous!"

"Come, Barbara," said Hilda close behind me. "We are all going, and I suppose you do not wish to be left in the wood."

"What, already?"

"It is six o'clock, and will be dusk before we reach home," replied my sister coldly. Then, drop-

ping her voice so as to be heard by me only:—"What folly have you been talking?" she added. "I have been standing here these five minutes, listening with amazement to all this nonsense about Rome and fame, and Heaven knows what beside! One would think you were a free scholar, like your dear friend here, and had to work for your bread!"

"One may work for something better than bread, sister," I replied smiling.

But she turned angrily away, and we were presently surrounded by a troop of the younger girls, all shouting and dancing, and laden with wild-flowers, like a bevy of little bacchantes.

"Look here, Ida," said one. "Here is a daisy-chain that would reach across the river! Did you ever see one so long?"

"I have found a lovely maiden-hair fern, roots and all, for Madame Brenner's fernery!" cried another.

"Ah!" exclaimed a third, "I know something which none of you know—such good news!"

"Good news!" repeated a dozen voices at once. "What is it? Oh, what is it?"

"Guess—but you'll never guess. Shall I tell you? Well, we are to have chocolate and cream-cakes for supper!"

And thus, chattering, laughing, and rejoicing, the merry crowd swept on homewards, and left the

setting sun behind the woods of Brühl. By and by some elder girls began singing four-part songs; and then the twilight came down; and the stars gleamed out in the green-blue sky; and the music mingled in with the lapsing of the river that ran beside us all the way.

It was almost dark by the time we reached the college. We were tired and silent enough now, and the wild-flowers had all been thrown away on the road. Still we were very happy, very hungry, very glad to be home again, and very glad to have been out.

The porter who opened the gate touched his hat and spoke to Madame Brenner. She left him, and came quickly into the midst of us.

"Barbara," said she, "Barbara and Hilda Churchill, where are you? Some friends of yours are here. You will find them waiting in the parlour."

Friends! Who could they be? Whence had they come? Save a flying call two or three years ago from dear old Mr. Bose, no one had asked for us ever since we had been in the College! Could it be my aunt? Could it be Hugh? I felt myself flush, and then grow pale again. Going up the steps, I clung involuntarily to Hilda's arm, and when we reached the parlour-door, trembled like a leaf.

The room was dimly lighted, and contained two

persons, a lady and a gentleman. The lady was lying back in an easy chair, and turned her head languidly at the opening of the door. The gentleman was standing at the window with his hands behind his back.

"Madame," said he, addressing himself with a stately bow to Madame Brenner, "permit me to introduce myself—Edmund Churchill—the father of your pupils."

The superintendent curtsied, and looked from him to us, expecting to see us fly into his arms. My father, however, bowed again and glanced towards the occupant of the easy chair, who rose slowly, and threw back her veil.

"And Mrs. Churchill," added he very ceremoniously. He then turned towards us for the first time.

"My dear children," said he, touching our foreheads lightly with his lips, "I rejoice to see you again. Be pleased to receive this lady with the affection and respect due to . . . ahem! your father's wife. Mrs. Churchill, I have the pleasure of presenting my daughters."

But that lady, instead of embracing us with maternal fervour, extended only the tips of two fingers, and said :—

"I had no idea that your 'little girls' were grown up, Mr. Churchill!"

CHAPTER XX.

HILDA DISCOVERS HER VOCATION.

AND so my father had married again—married again at sixty, and brought his bride to Zollenstrasse-am-Main! It was their honeymoon. They had come up the Rhine *viâ* Brussels, and were returning by way of Paris; having at present been just ten days *en voyage*. This event was so unexpected that at first I could scarcely realize it. It took me, in fact, some two or three days to form an opinion of my father's choice, and in order to express that opinion I find myself referring not exactly to my first impression, but to the successive impressions of several interviews.

Mrs. Churchill was what is generally called a fine woman. That is to say, she was large, well-defined, and of a comely presence. She was about forty years of age. Her hands were small, her teeth

admirable, her complexion well-preserved, and her taste in dress unexceptionable. Easy, indolent, self-possessed, and somewhat distant, her manner was that of a thorough woman of the world—or rather that of a woman who knew the world and herself by heart, and had determined to make the most of both. She was not clever—I soon discovered that—but she had tact. She knew what to admire, what tastes to profess, and how to give them effect. She spoke seldom, always slowly, and never unless she really had something to say. That something, if clever, was not original; and, if original, was not clever; but it was invariably judicious, and, like a paper currency, represented a value which was not intrinsic. Above all, she had studied the art of silence, and knew how to maintain a dignified repose. If that repose seemed somewhat artificial and over-elaborated—if she was, perhaps, on the whole, more fastidious than refined, more fashionable than highly bred, she could, nevertheless, be sufficiently gracious when she pleased, and was, beyond all doubt, well accustomed to the ways, means, and appliances of that little corner of society called "the world."

That she also had been previously married—that her first husband held a civil appointment in India under Lord Amherst, and there accumulated a considerable fortune—that he had been dead some

fifteen years or so, and left her with a consolatory jointure of several hundreds per annum—that she had since then travelled hither and thither; gone extensively into society; spent every season in Paris; and preferred the interesting *rôle* of a wealthy widow to that of a wife twice wedded, were facts which we soon learned, and which she herself was not slow to announce. Where and when she had first known my father, how she came to be wearied of her single life, and why she married him, were points left to conjecture. One thing, however, was evident—namely, that she was not prepared to find his "little girls" grown up; and I believe, to do him justice, that he was almost as much surprised himself. We were really little girls when he left us, six years ago, on board the Rotterdam steamer, and little girls, I have no doubt, he still expected to find us. Be that as it may, Mrs. Churchill was undisguisedly chagrined, and treated us for the first day or so with mortifying coldness. There is, however, a proverb in favour of second thoughts; and before a week was past, Mrs. Churchill had seen fit to reverse her tactics. Looking upon us, I suppose, as inevitable evils, she made up her mind to endure us with the best grace she could, and became, on a sudden, quite sympathetic and pleasant. She discovered that I had genius and originality; that Hilda's

beauty and accomplishments were of the highest order; and that she (Mrs. Churchill) was unfeignedly proud of us both. I cannot say that I was particularly elated by this tardy reception into my stepmother's good graces. I had neither sufficient respect for her understanding to value her praise, nor enough regard for herself to care much for her favour. But I received her advances with politeness, and endeavoured, for my father's sake, to keep on such terms as might ensure the comfort of our future intercourse.

Hilda, on the contrary, was completely won over by Mrs. Churchill's civilities, and tolerably well imposed upon by Mrs. Churchill's admirable manner. Having at first disliked our new stepmother ten times more bitterly than myself, she now found that she had judged too hastily of one who compared her singing to Persiani's, and herself to Lady Clementina Villiers. Thus it happened that in the course of a few days they were on the best footing imaginable; and before the second week was over, had become almost inseparable. Mrs. Churchill declared that she could go nowhere without Hilda—Hilda was only too well pleased to go everywhere with Mrs. Churchill. So they lunched, dined, and drove out together every day, more like a pair of romantic friends than a middle-aged bride and a grown-up step-

daughter. It is not impossible that Mrs. Churchill may have foreseen some such desirable effect, and acted accordingly.

Naturally fond of excitement, Hilda plunged with delight into this new life, and neglected everything for it. Mrs. Churchill's Paris bonnets, Mrs. Churchill's fashionable acquaintances, and Mrs. Churchill's patronage, almost turned her head. She talked, thought, dreamt of nothing but dress, amusement, and the people whom she daily met. Remonstrance on my part was useless; for Madame Brenner, knowing that my father intended to remain only a month, thought fit to allow us every liberty during his stay, and voluntarily released us from our collegiate duties. To her surprise, I availed myself but sparingly of that privilege, pursuing my daily studies much as usual, and only spending an evening now and then at my father's hotel.

Going in there one afternoon about seven o'clock, I found the dessert still on the table; Hilda trying on a bonnet before the glass; my father sipping his wine with half-closed eyes; and Mrs. Churchill lying on a sofa with her back to the light, and her head resting languidly on her arm. Mrs. Churchill always sat with her back to the light; and, having a white and very lovely arm, generally rested her head upon it.

My father looked up and nodded as I came in; Mrs. Churchill extended two fingers; Hilda turned eagerly towards me, and exclaimed:—

"Oh, Barbara, you are just in time to see my new bonnet! Is it not charming?"

"Yours!" I ejaculated, seeing what a thing of gauze and marabouts it was. "That bonnet, yours?"

"Mine—my own exclusive property! Is it not becoming?"

I hesitated. I had not yet reconciled myself to the metamorphosis in my sister's appearance; and though she looked handsomer than ever in these fashionable things, I could not help liking her old simple clothing best.

"It is stylish," I said, after a pause, "and, in a certain sense, becoming; but...."

"But what?"

"But I do not see of what use it will be to you when Mrs. Churchill is no longer here."

Hilda and my stepmother exchanged glances.

"In fact," I continued, "Madame Brenner will taboo it, as she tabooed Ildegarde's pink mantle last midsummer."

Hilda shrugged her shoulders.

"*Cela m'est égal!*" she said lightly. "I will, at all events, wear it while I can, and where I can. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof—*n'est ce pas, ma belle mére?*"

Mrs. Churchill nodded a languid affirmative, and Hilda went on.

"What would be the good of the present," said she, "if one were always fretting for the future? Let the future take care of itself. It is bad enough when it comes, without being anticipated!"

"The future," said Mrs. Churchill, significantly, "sometimes exceeds our anticipations. But our dear Barbara is practical—immensely practical!"

"Only with respect to bonnets," I replied, laughingly. "In other matters, I fear, I am as visionary as most people."

"I should like to know what those other matters are."

"Nay—I am not fond of telling my dreams!"

"Except to Ida Saxe by sunset, in the woods of Brühl," said Hilda satirically. "Come, Barbara, confess that, on one occasion, you were anything but practical."

But I was not disposed to enter on that subject before my father and his wife; so I only shook my head, and turned the conversation by asking what they had done since the morning.

"Done? Oh, not much to-day," replied my sister, still admiring the bonnet. "We promenaded in the gardens before lunch, drove to Wiesbach in the afternoon with papa, and dined at six. Why did you not come in time to dine?"

"The class broke up late to-day, and I could not leave sooner."

Hilda tossed her head impatiently.

"Be honest, Barbara," said she, "and say at once that you prefer the society of your easel to that of your relations."

"Be considerate, Hilda; and remember that satire is often neither witty nor true."

I answered sharply; for it seemed to me, somehow, that my sister was seeking either to provoke me, or to irritate the others against me. Be this as it might, Mrs. Churchill interposed before she had time to retort.

"My darling Hilda," said she, "I must positively find fault with you! Why blame your sister for a perseverance that does her so much honour? Our dear Barbara has genius, and the enthusiasm of genius. For my part, I adore art. I had rather have been Raphael than Shakespeare."

This was one of Mrs. Churchill's "effects." I began to know them now, and the little pause by which they were always followed.

"Besides," she added, after a minute, "Barbara is still very young, and youth is the season for study. Her industry, I am sure, is delightful. Perfectly delightful! Let us hope, however, that she will not overtax her strength. Art has its dangers as well as its fascinations; and I have

heard that oils are sometimes bad for the chest."

Laughing, I scarcely knew why, at something in the tone of Mrs. Churchill's observations, I hastened to assure her that she need entertain no such apprehensions for me.

"Painters," I said, "do not die so easily. When they love art, they have the good sense to live for it."

"And you really do love it, I suppose?" said my stepmother interrogatively.

"With my whole heart."

"And prefer your studies to all the pleasures of the great world?"

"I can conceive no greater misfortune than to leave them off."

Again Mrs. Churchill and Hilda glanced at one another, and I detected something like a flitting smile upon the face of each.

My father, who had been dozing for the last ten minutes or so with his cheek on his palm, now woke up and looked at his watch.

"A quarter to eight!" said he. "A quarter to eight already! Will it be agreeable to you, Mrs. Churchill, to order coffee?"

Mrs. Churchill was agreeable, and Hilda rang the bell.

My father was the same as ever—a little stouter and greyer, perhaps, and a little more bald than

when we left home; but the same man, every inch. He paced about the room; glanced in the looking-glass; and cherished his handsome hands just in the old way. He addressed his wife with as much stately politeness as he once addressed Miss Whymper. He was irritable with the waiters; despotic with the fly-drivers; and courteous to the chamber-maids. Above all, he planted himself on the rug, and turned his back to the fire with exactly the same air of commanding ownership; even though there were no fire there, but only an ugly, empty porcelain stove, with a blackened chimney reaching through the ceiling.

Having had coffee, and discussed the comparative attractions of the summer theatre, the Hofgarten, and the concert in the grounds of the Conversation-Haus, Mrs. Churchill and Hilda made an elaborate walking-toilette, and insisted that I, for once, should make one of the party. My father, not without a dissatisfied glance at my plain brown dress, then gave his arm to Mrs. Churchill, and we followed.

What with her new bonnet, and a lace shawl lent by our stepmother; and what with her own rich, haughty beauty, Hilda attracted all eyes, as we went along. Everyone turned to stare after her; and my father, proud of the general admiration, glanced back every now and then with a well-

satisfied smile, as if saying—"I am Edmund Churchill, and she is my daughter—my daughter, sir, and a Churchill, *pur sang!*"

Once arrived at the gardens, we were beset by a crowd of gentlemen.

"Friends of Mrs. Churchill," whispered Hilda. "And people of the highest fashion." She knew them all as they came up; had the name, rank, and profession of each at her fingers' ends; and seemed already intimate with most. Some she greeted with a jest, some with a shake of the hand, and for all had a bow, a smile, or a gracious word. I listened, looked on, and scarce believed my eyes. Ten days ago she was but a school-girl. Now I found her developed all at once into a consummate flirt; conscious of her advantages; and as thoroughly at her ease as Mrs. Churchill herself.

I cannot say that I was agreeably impressed by Mrs. Churchill's distinguished acquaintances; and yet they were very grand folks, Counts, Barons, Excellencies, and so forth, with nothing less dignified than a captain among them. They were all bearded, buttoned, frogged, and mustachioed, and wore little scraps of red or green ribbon at their breast. Perhaps the most striking amongst them, was a certain Captain Talbot, some thirty-five years of age and six feet two in height; bronzed, stalwart, as-

siduous; with something infinitely pursuasive in his voice and manner, and something unpleasantly bold in the expression of his eyes. I liked him less, and Hilda seemed to like him better, than any of the rest. They kept up an incessant fire of raillery and flirtation; and by and by, when, weary of promenading, we sat down to eat ices and listen to the music, he usurped the seat beside hers, and succeeded in keeping all others at a distance. Then my father strolled away to the roulette-tables; and Mrs. Churchill sat like a queen amid her little court, and gave utterance every now and then to judicious observations on Rossini, politics, millinery, and the fine arts.

Thus the evening passed, and I was glad when it was over.

All that night, and for several days and nights following, I was restless and disquieted. I now scarcely saw Hilda at all, unless in the refectory at breakfast, or at night when she came in late and tired, after having spent the day with Mrs. Churchill.

"How will she endure the old life, when they are gone?" I asked myself continually. "How will she exist without excitement? What of these fashionable men with whom she has been flirting for the last three weeks? How will she conform again to the old rules and simple pleasures of the school?"

Troubled and apprehensive, I turned these questions over and over in my mind, and could arrive at no conclusion.

"Would that they were gone!" I murmured anxiously, as I saw the evil deepening day by day. "Would to Heaven that they had never come!"

At length there arrived a night when my doubts were brought to an abrupt conclusion. It was the evening of the twenty-fifth of May, and my father's departure was fixed for the twenty-seventh. Hilda had been all day with them, as usual; the rest of the girls were gone for an evening walk; and I, tired and thoughtful, sat alone in the deserted class-room, looking out at the quiet garden and the gathering twilight. The banging of a distant door, the echo of a quick step in the corridor, and Hilda's sudden appearance at my elbow, roused me from my reverie.

"Well, Barbara," said she, "are you not surprised to see me so early?"

"It is early," I replied, "for you; but I suppose you are going back to spend the evening."

"No, I have come, on the contrary, to spend the evening with you and Madame Brenner. What do you think of that?"

"Why, that wonders will never cease; or that you are jesting."

"I am in earnest, I assure you."

"Then papa is not going away the day after to-morrow."

"He is going away, indeed, and—and I have something to tell you."

I looked up, and saw by the half-light that she was flushed and nervous.

"Something to tell me?" I repeated.

"Well, they are going," said Hilda reluctantly, "and . . . and . . . promise not to be dreadfully hurt or angry, dear!"

"Hurt! angry! What *can* you mean?"

"I mean that . . . that I am going with them."

"Going with them?" I faltered. "Impossible! In the middle of term . . . with the competition fixed for July . . . it is against the rules."

"What do I care for the rules, if I leave the College?" said Hilda, with a scornful gesture.

Leave the College! I sat down, bewildered, and looked at her silently.

"Why, you see," said my sister, speaking very fast, and plucking a pen to pieces, fibre by fibre, "I—I am not like you, Barbara. I don't love this place, as you do. I don't care for its rewards and honours, its medals, competitions, and petty successes, as you do. You desire nothing better than to be a painter—I would not be a singer for the universe. Work, in fact, is not my *metier*. I

hate it. I am tired of it. I have had enough of it. Besides, I am three years your senior, and it is time I ceased to be a school girl. Mrs. Churchill says I am destined to make a great success in society."

Mrs. Churchill. Ay, to be sure, this was her work.

"And then papa's plans are quite altered," she continued, finding that I remained silent. "Instead of going back to London, they mean to spend some months in Paris. Mrs. Churchill's Paris connection is immense; and she means to introduce me in all the best circles. It is not to be supposed, of course, with her means and position, that she will give up society just because she has married papa. Neither does he desire it. He has lived long enough out of the world, and it is time he returned to it, if only for your sake and mine. We must be introduced, you know, Barbara; and, as I am the elder, my turn comes first. You cannot object to that, surely?"

I shook my head sadly.

"Not if you prefer it," I said, speaking for the first time. "Not if you think you will be happy."

"Happy!" echoed she. "Why, of course, I shall be happy. Society is my vocation!"

"Society is a phantom—a mockery—an illusion. Beware how you trust it. It will vanish some day, 'and leave not a rack behind.'"

Hilda shrugged her shonlders disdainfully.

"For mercy's sake, no moralising!" exclaimed she. "I love life, and the little that I have seen disposes me to see more. You will like it, too, when you have the opportunity. Oh, how I long to be rid of this monotonous College routine, and all the art-jargon of our hum-drum professors!"

"Oh, Hilda!"

Touched by the reproach which my words conveyed, or moved, perhaps, by something like remorse for her own indifference, my sister bent down suddenly, and kissed me on the brow.

"I am sorry to leave you, dear," she said, apologetically; "but I cannot help rejoicing in my emancipation. I never was industrious or self-denying, like you; and papa and Mrs. Churchill are both very kind to me, and . . . and you have Ida Saxe, you know; and she will be here quite as long, or longer, than you—so you will not be lonely, or miss me very much when I am gone, will you?"

"If I felt sure you would have no reason to repent the change," said I, speaking very slowly, and mastering the tears that rose unbidden to my eyes; "if I knew that your relations with Mrs. Churchill would continue to be as pleasant as they now are, believe, Hilda dear, that I should desire nothing farther."

"You will not even be vexed with me for going?"

"Not in the least."

"Come, that is reasonable! I had no idea that you would have taken my news so good-temperedly, or I would have told you long ago. Why, I have been hesitating for the last eight days, in the dread that we should have some horrid scene about it, and now .... well, enough of that! I wish you would come with me to my bedroom, and help me to make the inventory of my wardrobe. I must pack to-night before I go to bed; for they have made up their minds to go down the river to-morrow, and I shall not have a moment to spare."

About an hour after this we supped together for the last time at the general table, and in the morning she took leave of the school, and removed with her luggage to my father's hotel. Madame Brenner embraced her, and the girls bade her a kindly farewell; but there were no tears shed on either side, and the parting, altogether, was cool enough.

"The Fräulein might have done her teachers the justice to wait, at least, for the July competition," said Professor Oberstein, not without a touch of bitterness.

"Or have left us with something like regret," observed Madame Brenner.

"Oh, Barbara!" whispered one of the younger children, nestling close to my side, "had *you* been going away, how sorry we should have been!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A DIPLOMATIC INTERVIEW.

"An artist, an organist, a pianist, all these are very good people; but, you know, not '*de notre monde*,' and Clive ought to belong to it."

The Newcombes.

"YOU are of course aware, Barbara," said my father, "that my income is circumscribed—exceedingly circumscribed—and that your educational expenses have been heavy."

Mrs. Churchill and Hilda were upstairs, busied with their last travelling arrangements. My father and I were sitting at opposite sides of the breakfast table, with the hotel bill and the empty coffee cups between us.

"You ought also to be informed," he added, "that although Mrs. Churchill is possessed of good private means, my own circumstances are not ma-

terially bettered by the alliance. I am even, in some respects, a poorer man than before. I must resume my position in society, reside in a better house, and inevitably increase the general ratio of my private expenditure."

Not knowing what reply was expected of me, or to what end this statement tended, I bowed, and was silent.

"I purpose, nevertheless," continued he, "to leave you here for the present. I believe that you have perseverance, and a certain amount of—of ability; and I have too much regard for your progress to withdraw you just yet from the College. This decision, understand, will put me to considerable inconvenience—very considerable inconvenience—which I am, however, disposed on your account to meet. On your account only."

Feeling almost overwhelmed, if not by the magnitude of the favour, at all events by the manner in which it was announced, I stammered a word or two of thanks.

"Circumstanced as I am," said my father, after a brief pause, "I cannot provide for my family as I would. I am a poor man, and it is indispensable that the daughters of a poor man should marry well. For sons I could have made interest in high quarters; but to my daughters I can give only descent and education. Hilda, I feel sure,

will do well. She has tact, style, conversation, and . . . ."

"And beauty," I suggested.

"Exactly so. And beauty," said he, with something like a shade of polite embarrassment. "She will marry, no doubt, before the expiration of the year; in which case the field will be open to you. In the meantime I desire to draw your attention very particularly to one or two matters."

He was as formal to me now that I was grown up, as he was brusque and harsh when I was a child! It was strange, but, sitting opposite to each other at eight o'clock this bright May morning, with the travelling *calêche* waiting at the door, and the certainty of a long separation before us, we were carrying on our conversation as distantly as if, instead of being father and daughter, we were a couple of ambassadors discussing affairs of state!

Finding that he was now coming to the point, I bowed again and waited anxiously.

"In the first place," said he, "you must cultivate manner. As a child you were awkward; and even now you are deficient in that style which your sister appears instinctively to have acquired. Style is the first requisite for society; and on society a young woman's prospects depend. I have sometimes feared, Barbara, that you do not sufficiently appreciate society."

"I—I must confess, sir, that for me it possesses few attractions."

My father shook his head, and trifled diplomatically with his snuff-box.

"So much the worse for you," he observed, drily. "I have no fortune for you; remember that. If you do not marry, what is to become of you?"

"I should hope, sir, that my profession will at all times enable me to live."

He looked fixedly at me, as if scarcely comprehending the sense of my words.

"Your *what*?" he said at length. "Your . . . . say that again."

"My profession, sir," I repeated, not without a strange fluttering at my heart.

"Your profession!" he exclaimed, flushing scarlet. "Upon my soul, I was not aware that you had one! What is it, pray? The church, the law, or the army?"

The tears came rushing to my eyes. I looked down. I could have borne his anger; but I had no reply for his sarcasm.

"I suppose," he continued, "that, because you have been daubing here for the last few years, you fancy yourself a painter?"

"I—I had hoped . . . ."

"Hope nothing!" interrupted he. "Hope no-

thing on that head, for I will never countenance it! Do you suppose that I—a Churchill—will permit my daughter to earn her bread like a dressmaker? Do you suppose, if I had had a son, that I would have allowed him to become a beggarly painter? If you have ever dreamt of this (and I suppose it has been instilled into you at this confounded College), forget it. Forget it once for all, and never let me hear another word about it!"

Still trembling as I had so often trembled before him in my early childhood, I nevertheless dashed away the tears, and looked up into his face.

"But, sir," I said firmly, "if you have no fortune for me, and if I do not marry—what then?"

"I will hear of no alternative. You *must* marry. It is your duty to marry. Every well-born and well-bred young woman who is properly introduced, has opportunities of marriage. You are tolerably good-looking. There is no reason why you should not succeed in society as well as others. Let me hear no more of this sign-painting nonsense. It displeases me exceedingly."

Saying which, he rose coldly, moved towards the door, and was leaving without another glance at me; but I had something to say—something that I had not yet ventured to say, though I had seen him daily for a month.

"Stay," I cried, hurriedly. "One question, sir —it is the only moment, the last moment, I can ask it. What of Mrs. Sandyshaft? Is she still living?"

He flushed again, and paused with his hand upon the door.

"Yes," he replied, "I believe that she is living."

"And has she never written to you? Never asked for me? Never attempted to recall me?"

"Never," said he, with mingled impatience and embarrassment. "Never."

And so passed on abruptly, and left the room.

I dropped into the nearest chair and covered my face with my hands. Alas! I was quite, quite forgotten.

Presently they all came down, cloaked and ready for the journey. Hilda tried to look serious at parting.

"Good-bye, darling," she said, kissing me repeatedly. "I am so sorry to leave you; but I will write from Paris as soon as we arrive. You will not fret, will you?"

"Fret!" echoed Mrs. Churchill, taking my disengaged hand between both of hers. "How can she fret when she has Art, divine Art, for her companion? Adieu, dearest girl—we shall not forget you!"

They then stepped into the carriage — my

father touched my cheek coldly with his lips, and as he did so, whispered "Remember"—the courier shut up the steps—the coachman cracked his whip —my sister waved her hand, and, amid jingling harness-bells, bowing waiters, and a world of clattering and prancing, they drove rapidly away, and vanished in a cloud of dust round the corner of the Theater-platz.

That night I went sorrowfully to bed and lay awake for hours, thinking of Hilda, of the future, of my old Suffolk home, and of all that had there befallen me. Was I never again to see her who had been more to me than a mother? Was I never more to clasp that hand which placed the silver ring on mine, long, long ago, in the far away woods about Broomhill?

Heigho! There it lay—there, in the corner of my desk—the Arab's ring, with the old watch-guard knotted to it still!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STUDENT IN ART.

"Art's a service."—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

THERE is something almost sacred in the enthusiasm, the self-devotion, the pure ambition of the student in art. He, above all others, lives less for himself than for the past and all that made it glorious. What to him is the ignorant present? What the world, and the pleasures of the world? Truth, excellence, beauty, are his gods; and to them he offers up the sacrifice of his youth. He is poor; but poverty is a condition of endeavour. He is unknown; but were it not better to wrest one revelation from failure, than be blinded by a foolish prosperity? For his remote and beautiful Ideal he is content to suffer all things—privation, obscurity, neglect. Should the world never recognise

him, can he therefore be said to have lived in vain? Has he not acquired the principles of beauty; studied under Michael Angelo; adored Raffaelle from afar off? Humble, earnest, steadfast, is he; modest of his own poor merit; and full of wonder and admiration as a little child. Infinitely touching are his hopes, his fears, his moments of despondency and doubt—infinitely joyous and repaying are his first well-earned successes. No mean desires leaven as yet the unsullied aspirations of his soul. A copper-medal, a wreathe that will fade ere night, a word of encouragement from one whose judgment he reveres, are more to him than an inheritance. Worth, not wealth, is the end of his ambition; and he is richer in the possession of these frail testimonies than in any of those grosser rewards with which society could crown him.

Surely there may be found in all this something admirable and instructive—something which bears unmistakable impress of the old heroic element! What but this same mood of simple faith and constancy inspired the masterpieces, the martyrdoms, the discoveries of the past? What but this sent Leonidas to Thermopylæ, and Montrose to the scaffold; held Columbus on his course across the waste of waters, and consoled Galileo for the ridicule and persecution of his age?

It is pleasant thus to consider the nature of the

student; to accept him as our living representative of the heroic race of gods and men—as the last lone dweller on those "shores of old romance" which, but for himself and the poets, were now well-nigh blotted from our charts. Let us cherish him, for he is worthy of all cherishing. Let us praise him, for he is worthy of all praise; and this independently of any genius that may be in him, but for love of that which he loves, and in honour of that which he honours.

Dwelling in the Art-School of Zollenstrasse-am-Main; sharing the hopes, efforts, and daily life of the scholars; witnessing their generous emulation, and partaking their simple pleasures, I came insensibly to form these views of art and its influences; to regard it as a high, almost as a holy calling; and to idealise, to a certain extent, the mission of the student. Under other circumstances, and in any other land, I might have had reason to judge differently; but it is not in the German nature to be diverted from a lofty pursuit by petty passions. Reflective, persevering, somewhat obstinate and limited in his opinions, somewhat heavy and phlegmatic by temper, the German student lives in brotherly relations with his fellow-labourers; helps cheerfully where help is needed; praises heartily where praise is due; and is too much in earnest about his own work to envy the progress or scorn

the efforts of others. So national is he, indeed, and so thoroughly does he identify himself with the general cause, that he rejoices honestly in their success, and finds in it matter for self-encouragement. Of this disposition I never beheld more proof than during the six or seven weeks which intervened between my father's departure and the date of our July festival.

It was a momentous epoch for us. Report said that it would be the grandest competition ever known since the founding of the school. We all had something to strive for, and something to hope. In every department the students were working like bees; and, though it be the tritest of similes, I defy you to have avoided comparing the whole college to one vast hive, had you stood at hot noon in the midst of the empty courtyard, listening to the hum that issued from the open windows all around.

We had, indeed, abundant motive for industry, since a harvest of honour, and prizes for every branch of study, awaited our success. Concerts and musical examinations were to take place, and an exhibition of fine arts was to be held in the great-room of the Conversation-Haus. Amateurs, professors, and strangers were expected from far and near. The names of Heine, Lamartine, Overbeck, Waagen, Schwanthaler and others, were al-

ready stated to be upon the list of judges. King Louis of Bavaria, it was said, was coming to visit the Grand Duke; and some even whispered of the probable presence of Danneker, the venerable Danneker, "whose hand sculptured the beauteous Ariadne and the Panther." What wonder, then, if every student were at work, heart, soul, and brain, for the coming trial? What wonder if the musicians deafened us all day; if we painters smelt of megilp and copal varnish from morning till night, and came in to dinner as plentifully besmeared with yellow ochre and Venetian red as a society of Cherokees or Blackfeet; if the teachers were all in a state bordering on distraction; and if Professor Metz (grown more ruthless and satirical than ever) hovered about the studios like a critical Asmodeus, breaking our hearts daily?

"You are a colony of daubers," he used to say; "canvas-spoilers, caricaturists! Were I Dame Nature, I would bring an action against you for libel. Do you call these pictures? They are not pictures. They are senseless masses of colour. What do they mean? What do they teach? What do they prove? Keep every other commandment as faithfully as you have kept the second, and you will do well; for these are likenesses of nothing that is in heaven or earth! *Gott im Himmel!* if I am on the hanging committee, I'll turn every canvas to the wall!"

Notwithstanding this cold comfort on the part of our imperious Professor, we worked merrily on, encouraging and helping one another, and looking forward to the coming trial with expectations far from despondent. Ida, whose talent for landscape was unrivalled among us, touched up the mountains in Bertha's "Flight into Egypt." Bertha, whose figures were capital, put in a group of shepherds for Gertrude, whose "Vale of Tempe" would have been nothing without them—Luisa, a very Pre-Raffaellite of finish, manufactured weedy foregrounds by the dozen—and Frederika, whose forte lay in aerial perspective, dashed in skies and blue mists and graduated flights of birds for almost every girl in the class. As for poor Emma Werner, who really had no talent whatever, we all helped her, and produced by our combined efforts a very tolerable picture, which, I may as well observe at once, carried off a third-class medal, and made the crowning glory of her life for ever after.

I have hesitated, up to this point, whether or no to dwell upon my share of the hopes and toils of the time—whether to describe my own picture, or leave all such details to the imagination of those who read my story. Yet this book is the true chronicle of my life; and that picture was more than my life for many and many a month. I had

it before my eyes at all times of the day, and in all places. I saw it painted on the darkness when I woke, restless and feverish, in the midst of the summer night. I knew every inch of it by heart, and could have reproduced it from memory, touch for touch, without the variation of a hair's breadth, right or left. My opinion fluctuated about it all this time to a degree that nearly drove me mad. Sometimes I delighted in it—sometimes I loathed it. Twenty times a day I passed from the summit of hope to the lowest depths of despair. Twenty times a day I asked myself, "Is it good? Is it bad? Am I a painter; or have I deceived myself with the phantom of a vain desire?" I could not answer these questions. I could only hope, and fear, and paint on, according to the promptings that were in me.

My subject was Rienzi; my scene, the ruins of the Forum. A solitary figure seated, draped and meditative, upon a fallen capital at the foot of the column of Phocas; a dim perspective of buildings with the Colosseum far away in the shadowy distance; a goat browsing in the foreground; and, over all, a sky filled with the last rose-tints of the sunken sun, steeping all the earth and the base of every pillar in rich shadow, and touching church-tower, pediment, and sculptured capital with a glory direct from heaven—this was the scene I

strove to paint, the dream I strove to realise, the poem I strove to utter. How imperfect that utterance was, and how vague that dream, none now know better than myself; but all the romance and ambition of my youth were lavished on it, though I have painted better pictures since, yet, in one sense, have I never painted another so good.

And thus the weeks went by, and the appointed time came up with rapid strides, desired yet dreaded, and pregnant with events.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FESTIVAL OF FINE ARTS.

THE great week came at last, and with it such shoals of visitors as filled the town of Zollenstrasse-am-Main to overflowing. Every hotel, lodging-house, boarding-house, gasthaus, and suburban inn was crammed from basement to garret. The King of Bavaria was at the palace, and the King of Würtemberg at the Kaiser Krone over the way. Every boat, diligence, and public conveyance came laden daily with double its lawful freight. Travelling calèches multiplied so rapidly that the inn yards were in a state of blockade. The streets swarmed with officers of the royal suites, and every passer-by wore a uniform or a court suit. As for honorary ribbons, you saw as much in half-

an-hour as might have stocked a haberdasher's shop, and stars were as plentiful as if the milky way had dropped in upon a visit.

The Competition lasted just a week, and was arranged according to programme, thus:—

On Monday and Wednesday the musicians competed in the Academy concert room for the best orchestral symphony, instrumental quartett, and four-part song. On Tuesday and Thursday, the solo players and vocalists gave a public concert. On Friday and Saturday was held an exhibition of paintings and sculptures by the art-students. Sunday, however, the grandest day of all, was set apart for the distribution of prizes. For this ceremony the Assembly-room of the Conversation Haus was to be fitted up, and no visitor could be admitted without a card of invitation. Then, besides all this, we had a French company at the theatre; a review; a boar-hunt; a ball every night at the Conversation Haus; and a fair in the public gardens—to say nothing of the extra roulette tables which Messieurs Fripon and Coquin found it necessary to provide for the occasion. A fine time, truly, for Zollenstrasse-am-Main—a fine time for the Grand Duke, the hotel keepers, and the blacklegs!

Nor were we students one whit less excited than the rest of the community; for till the Sunday

we knew no more than others what our fate would be. Every second day the committees of judgment met, discussed, passed resolutions, and recorded decisions of which we could in no wise foretell the purport. Whose would be the first prize, and whose the second? Would the medal be his, or hers, or mine? For my own part, when I saw the works of art assembled together in one hall, and came to compare my picture with those of my competitors, I lost all heart, and believed it to be the most egregious failure there.

At length the six days and nights were past, and the Sunday morning dawned, bright and hot, and flooded with intensest light. The ceremony was announced for two o'clock in the afternoon; so we went to church, as usual, in the morning, though none of us, I fear, attended much to the service. By half-past one we were at the Conversation Haus, and in our places. It was a magnificent room, some eighty feet in length, decorated with alternate panellings of looking-glass and fresco-painting, and hung with superb chandeliers, like fountains of cut glass. At the upper end, on a dais of crimson cloth, stood a semicircle of luxurious arm-chairs for the Duke and his chief guests; to the left of the dais a platform of seats, tier above tier, for the accommodation of the minor nobility; and to the right of the dais, a similar

platform for the artists and men of letters from among whom the different committees had been organised. Directly facing this formidable array, on benches that extended half way down the room, and were divided off from the lower end by a wooden barrier, we students were seated—the youths on one side, and the girls on the other, with a narrow alley between. In the space behind us and in the gallery above the door, were crowded all those spectators who, having procured cards, were fortunate enough to find places.

For the first half-hour all was confusion and chatter. Everybody was staring at everybody else, asking questions which nobody could answer, and making wild guesses which somebody else was sure to contradict immediately. "Where will the Grand Duke sit?" "Who is that stout man with the crimson ribbon on his breast?" "Which is Baron Humboldt, and which the Chevalier Bunsen?" "Do you see that old man with the silver locks?—that is Longfellow, the American poet." "Nonsense, Longfellow is quite a young man. It is more likely Danneker, or Beranger, or Dr. Spohr!" "See, there is Professor Metz—there, yonder, talking to that strange-looking animal with the red beard and the brown court suit!" "Animal, do you call him? Why, that is Alexandre Dumas." "Alexandre Dumas? Absurd! Do

you not know that Dumas is a negro, and did you ever see a negro with red hair?"

And so forth, questioning, guessing, and contradicting, till two o'clock struck, and the Grand Duke, preceded by a couple of ushers and followed by five or six gentlemen in rich uniforms, came in, and took his seat upon the centre chair. The others placed themselves to his right and left.

A low buzz, that subsided presently into a profound silence, ran round the room. Then the Duke rose, and pronounced that celebrated speech which, after being printed on pink glazed paper, and distributed gratuitously to the visitors, reading-room subscribers, and academy students, was not only reprinted on coarse white ditto, and sold at the price of three kreutzers per copy, but was also reviewed, extracted, criticised, ridiculed, praised, quoted, and commented upon by every journal, magazine, and literary organ throughout the thirty-eight independent states of the Germanic Confederation.

I am not going to incorporate that speech, eloquent as it was, with my personal narrative. I shall not even recapitulate the heads of it, or dwell, however briefly, on those brilliant passages wherein his Serene Highness was pleased to enlarge upon the pleasures and advantages of the arts; to cite Plato, Fichte, Lord Bacon, and Sir Joshua Rey-

nolds; to compare our Academy with the School of Athens; and finally, in drawing a skilful parallel between the Grand Duchy of Zollenstrasse-am-Main and that other insignificant Grand Duchy of Central Italy where Michael Angelo dwelt, Giotto painted, and Dante was born, to liken himself, with infinite modesty, to no less a patron and promoter of learning than Lorenzo of Tuscany, surnamed the Magnificent.

Enough, then, that his Highness spoke the speech "trippingly on the tongue;" that it was applauded as loudly as etiquette permitted; and that, at the close thereof, receiving a written paper from one of the ushers, he began the business of the day by summoning one Friedrich Bernstoff, of Würtemberg, free scholar, to receive a first class medal for the best orchestral symphony.

"Herr Friedrich Bernstoff," echoed the usher, "Herr Friedrich Bernstoff is requested to advance."

A pale slender boy rose from the ranks of his companions, and stepped forward to the foot of the dais. The Duke addressed him in a few congratulatory but scarcely audible words; presented him with a small morocco case containing a gold medal; and then, stooping slightly forward, placed a fillet of laurel leaves upon his brow. The boy blushed, bent low, and returned to his seat, glad to

escape observation and to snatch the wreath away as soon as nobody was looking.

The same ceremony then continued to be repeated with little or no variation, as the musical candidates were called up, one by one, throughout the sultry hours of the July afternoon.

Next came the sculptors, of whom there were but few in the school, and whose audience was proportionately brief. Lastly, after a tantalising pause, during which his Serene Highness chatted with provoking nonchalance to his left-hand neighbour, Professor Metz came hurriedly to the foot of the dais, and, bowing, placed a paper in his Highness's hand. A whispered conference ensued. The Duke smiled; the professor retired; the usher cleared his throat, and waited the word of command. Instead, however, of giving, as before, the name of the successful competitor, his Highness rose and addressed us, somewhat to the following effect:—

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the Academy—As regards the prizes which remain to be presently awarded, we have been placed—ahem!—in a position of some doubt and difficulty—which position, ladies and gentlemen, I hasten—that is to say, I feel it due to yourselves to—in short, to explain."

(There were ill-natured tongues in the room which compared this speech with the preceding.

and hesitated not to point out the difference between things studied and things extemporised.)

"Our rules," continued his Highness, "are exact with regard to most emergencies—for instance, ladies and gentlemen, we cannot admit a foreigner to—to the advantages of a free scholarship. You are all aware of that. We have, however, had very few foreigners, as yet, among our numbers—at present, I believe, we have only two. The difficulty to which I allude has arisen out of—of the fact that one of these foreigners has been judged to—to deserve a prize which up to this time has never been awarded to any but a native of Germany. Divided between the desire to be just, and the fear of—of overstepping the laws of our institution, the committee of criticism have hesitated up to this moment, and I have but now received their decision through the hands of our friend, Professor Metz. The prize in question, ladies and gentlemen, is for the best historical painting in oils. Were we to be swayed by prejudices of sex or nation, that prize would be awarded to Herr Johann Brandt, whose 'Siege of Corinth' is, in point of drawing and composition, inferior to only one picture in the hall; but, ladies and gentlemen, having considered the matter under all its—under every aspect, the committee decides that, although the first prize for the first historical painting has never

yet been decreed to a foreigner, or—or a lady, it must on the present occasion in justice be bestowed upon . . . ."

Here he referred to the paper—

—"Upon Mademoiselle Barbara Churchill, native of England, and six years a resident student in this Academy."

"Mademoiselle Barbara Churchill," repeated the usher, with an accent that left my name almost unrecognisable. "Mademoiselle Barbara Churchill is requested to advance."

Utterly confused and sceptical, I rose up, stood still, and, conscious of the eyes of the whole room, dared not leave my place.

"Come, my pupil," said a kind voice close beside me. "Fear nothing."

It was Professor Metz, who had made his way down the central alley, and offered me the support of his arm.

I do not remember if I took it—I do not even remember how I came there; but I found myself the next moment standing at the foot of the dais, and the Duke bending over me, with the laurels in his hand. He spoke; but I heard only the sound of his voice. He placed the medal in my hand, and the wreath upon my head. I stooped, instinctively, to receive it; and this done, turned tremblingly and awkwardly enough, to return to my

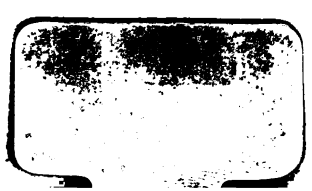
place. As I did so, I looked up, and there amid the visitors to the right of the dais—there, bending earnestly forward, conspicuous among a hundred others, pale, eager-eyed, dark-haired, with the old impetuous glance, and the old free bearing, I saw —oh, joy!—for the first time since that morning in the woods, long years ago—my childhood's idol, my hero, Farquhar of Broomhill!

It was not the suddenness of the announcement —it was neither confusion, nor fatigue, nor the emotion of an unexpected triumph—it had nothing whatever to do with prizes, examinations, or Grand Dukes . . . it was the sight of that one swarthy face, and the shock of those dark eyes shining into mine, that sent the room reeling, and made me lean so heavily on the professor's proffered arm.

"You need air," he whispered, and led me to an ante-room, where Madame Brenner brought me a glass of wine and water, and insisted on taking me back at once to the College. I went to my bed-room, and entreated to be left quite alone.

"If I sleep," I said, "I shall be better."

But it was not sleep that I wanted. It was solitude and silence.

END OF VOL. I.

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